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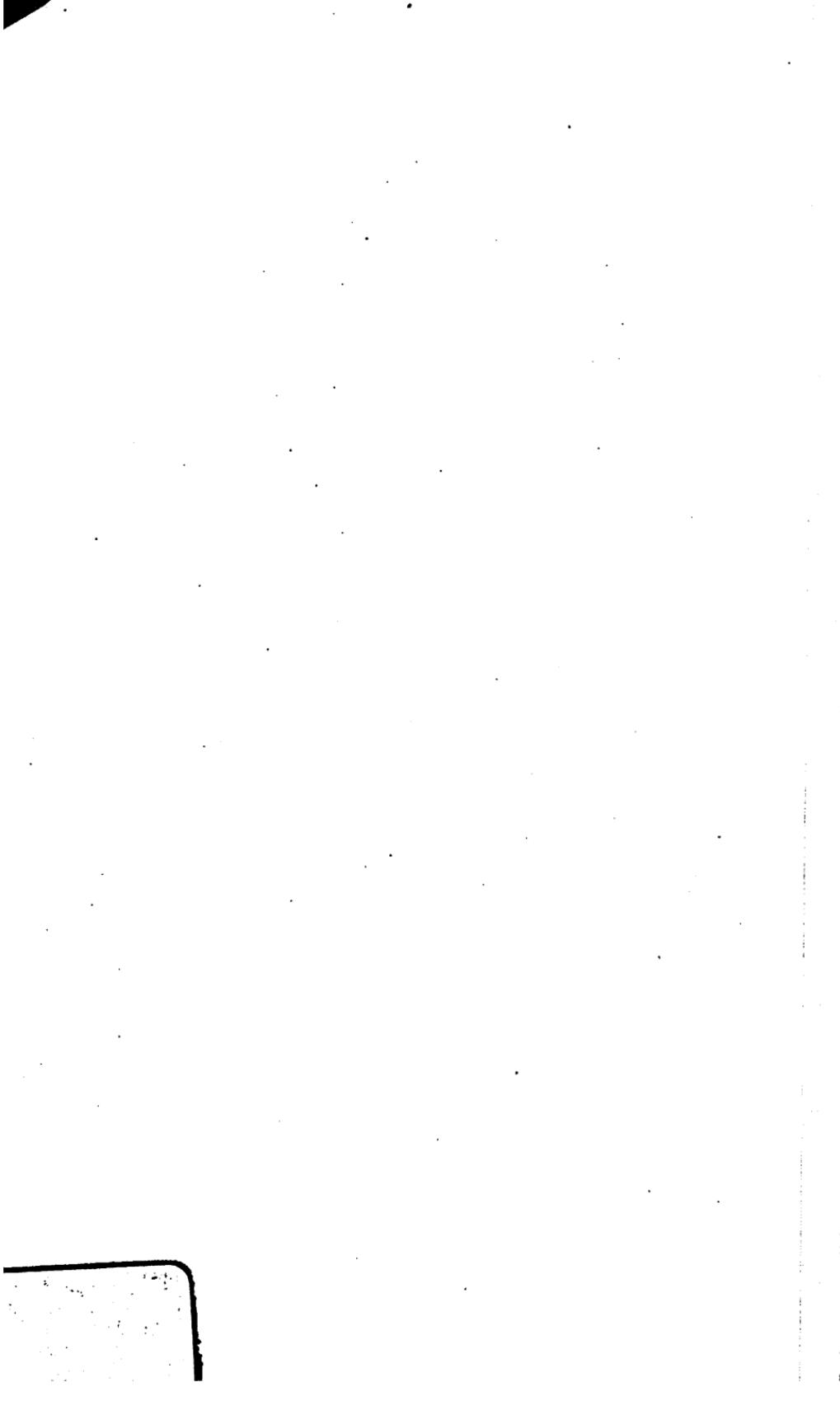
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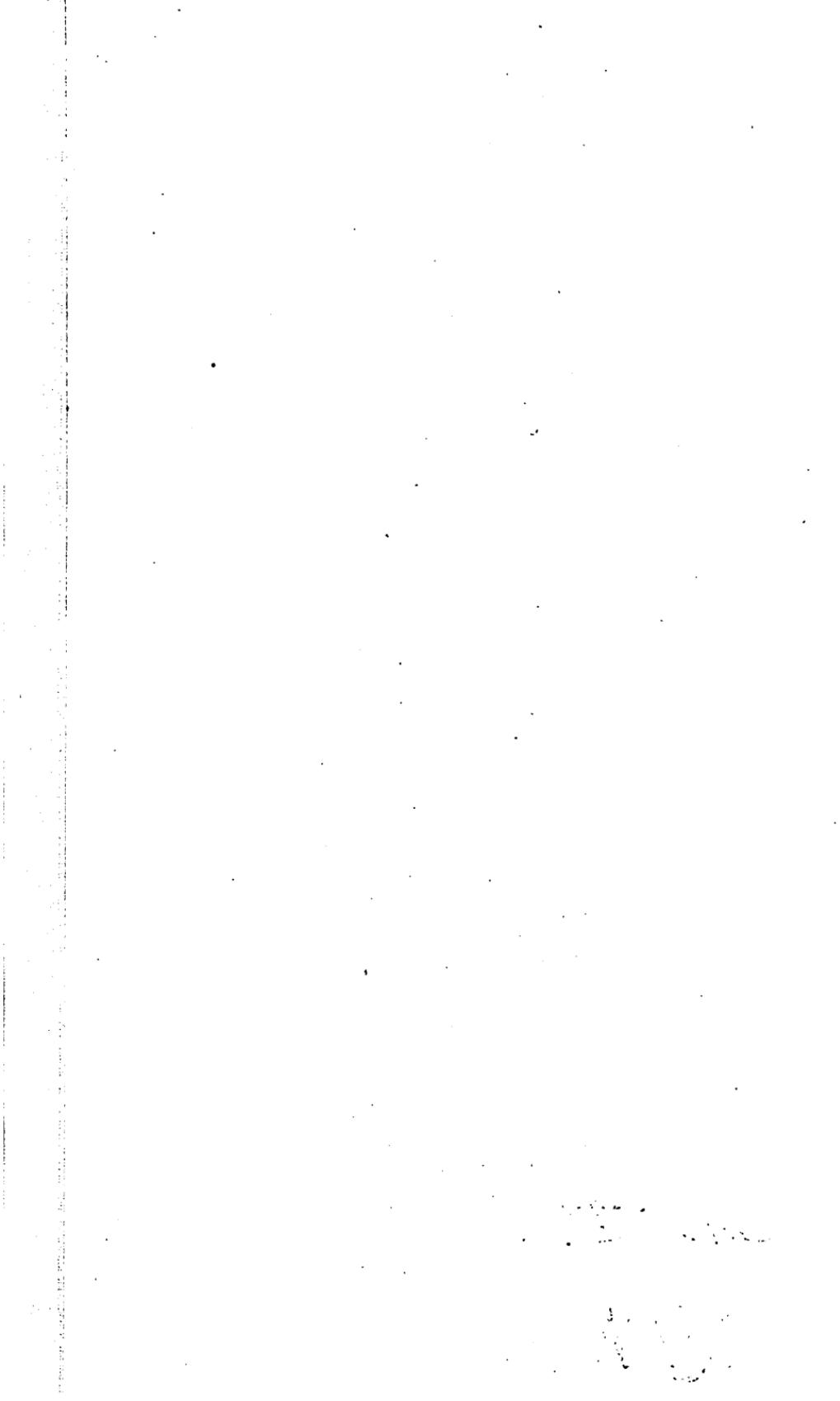
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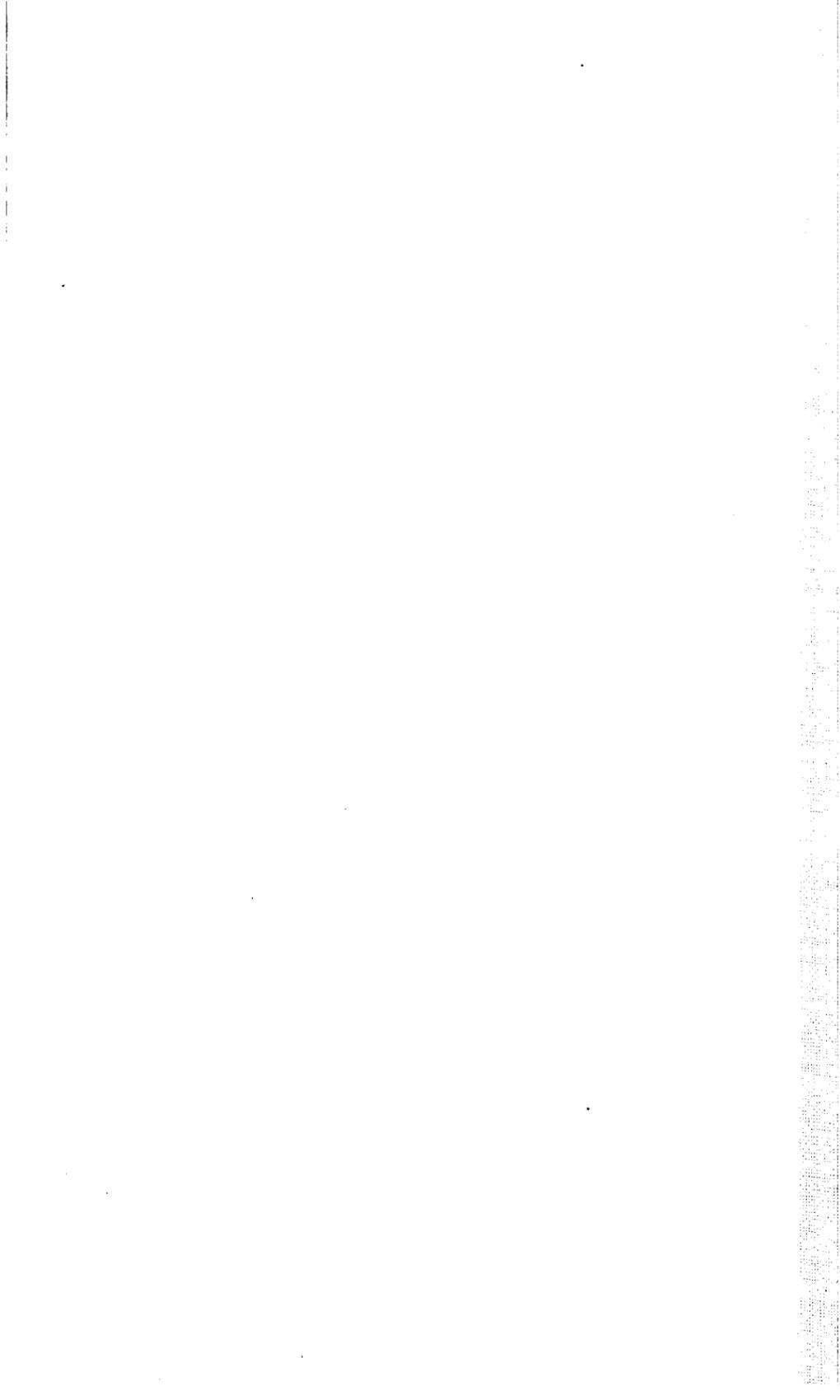
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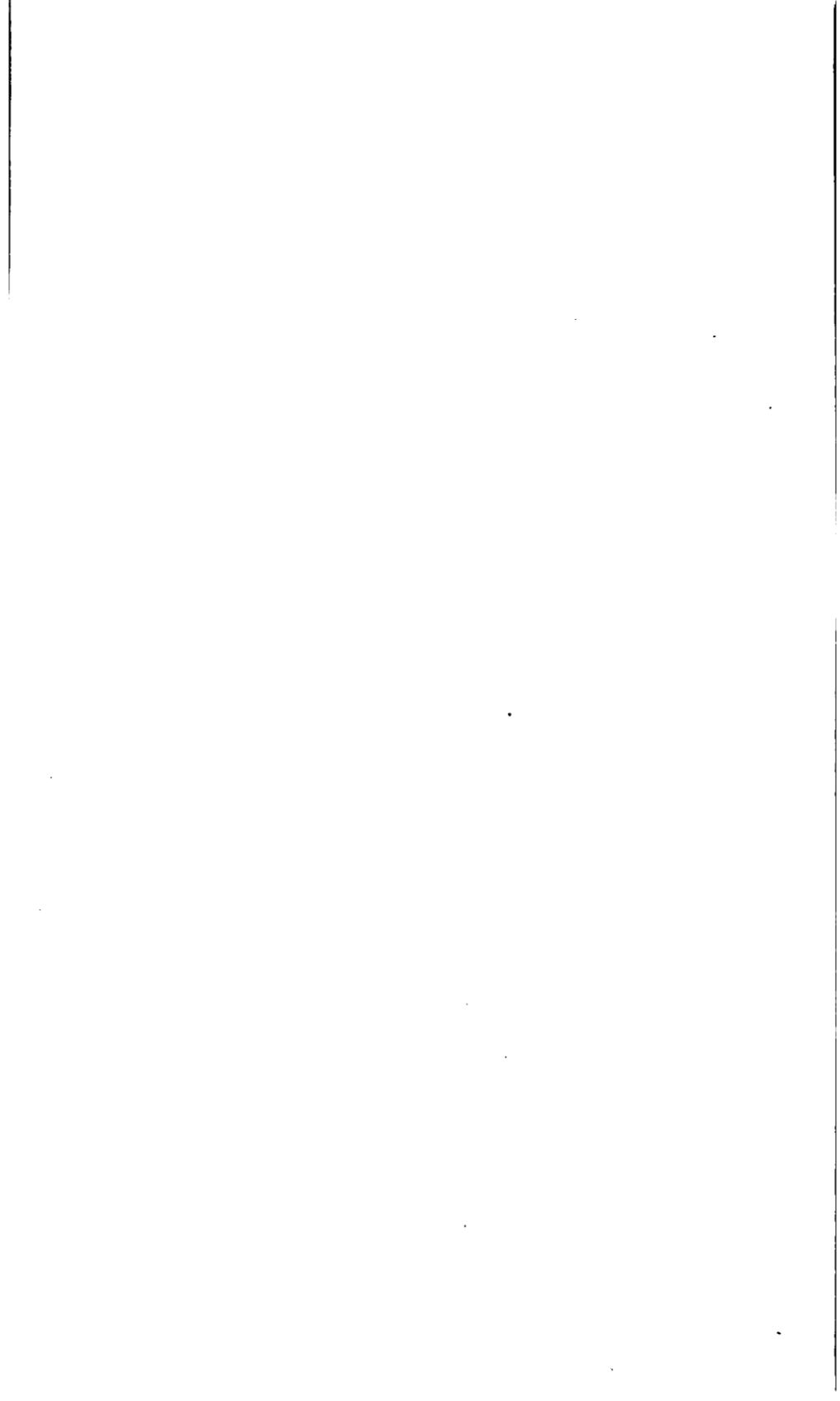


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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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إِنَّا لَنَا مِنَ الْأَنْوَارِ
فَلَمَّا أَتَيْنَاكُمْ مِنْ فَضْلِنَا
مِنْ كُلِّ مَا تَرَكَ الْأَنْوَارُ

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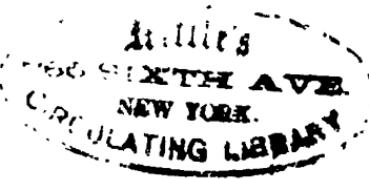


"He sprang forward, and leaning across the boat threw the lantern's rays into the hollow."

[Irene, page 37.]

I R E N E,

B



A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE;

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I R E N E,

A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

P A R T I.

CHAPTER I.

MY new neighbors had moved in, and my old ones were wondering who they could be.

The house the new neighbors had bought was situated directly opposite to mine. It was of brick, painted gray, with large rooms, high ceilings and wide, square windows. It was sufficiently homelike, notwithstanding its aristocratic style of architecture.

The new-comers had arrived after

dark: no one had had a glimpse of them, but, as is sure to be the case in all places except large cities, everybody was already on the *qui vive* to learn their history.

On the second morning after their arrival I prepared to call on them. I thought it could not be too soon, as they had sent me a letter of introduction from an old schoolmate of mine, in which she asked me to be kind to them for her sake, adding that they were

people of good standing and some means, but entire strangers to every one in our town. I was careful not to let the contents of this letter get abroad, but the fact of my having received it I could not conceal.

My ring was answered by a waiter-boy, who threw the hall door wide open, but did not offer to show me into the parlor. I handed him my card: he looked at it, but did not move.

"Take that to your mistress," I said, and he bolted, leaving me standing on the doorsill. "Well!" I thought, "a pretty beginning! But I think I shall take a seat, even if I have not been asked." It was well I did so, for certainly a half hour passed before I saw another soul. Of course I felt embarrassed, not knowing what to do. The hall was a scene of confusion, and so was every room of which I could get a glimpse through the half-open doors. Finally, a young woman came along, evidently on some errand, for she did not notice me at first, and so gave me a good opportunity of looking at her. I felt sure she could not be the lady of the house, for my friend had written that Mrs. Charlton was a middle-aged person with several children: indeed, I could hardly believe that this person was a lady. Being short and rather stout, her loose, ill-fitting dress gave her a very dowdyish appearance. She was not at all pretty: her complexion was dark and her hair and eyes were light.

On seeing me she expressed no surprise and made no excuse for her dress, but merely asked if "mother had not been down yet;" at the same time pushing open the parlor door.

"Come in," she continued, in a sweet voice that contrasted strangely with her appearance and manner. "Though this room doesn't look much better than the hall, you will be able to get a comfortable seat."

It did not, in fact, look much better, despite an elegant velvet carpet on the floor and rich furniture and pictures scattered in every direction. I seated myself in a large chair; then glanced

round at my companion, who was busying herself with books and sheet music.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, "when shall we ever get straight? With all the servants that are in this house, I should think the parlor might have been fixed by this time. But there's Billy, that never will learn any sense. Half these things belong up stairs, I do declare!"

She paused and looked around. I felt I ought to say something, but at such times we are apt to be unlucky in our remarks, as I was on this occasion.

"The trouble arises," I observed, "from want of system. The best plan when one moves is to unpack all the things in one room or hall, and as they are unpacked and dusted, have them carried to their proper places. Then they get distributed and arranged much more quickly, and the whole house does not get dusty and soiled."

In reply to this speech she said, curtly, "I should like to see any one systematic in this house!"

If she had meant to add anything more, she was prevented by the entrance of another lady. I rose, and, as my present companion took no notice of the new-comer, I stepped forward and introduced myself. Mrs. Charlton shook hands, saying, "Keep your seat, Mrs. Stone;" and when we had both sat down she turned to her daughter with the inquiry—

"What were you saying about system, Fannie?"

"I said no one liked it in this house."

"Fannie, I have always liked it, but I can't get you and Laura to practice it."

What was there in her voice that made it so fascinating? It was not so sweet as Fannie's, nor was it strong, like hers: it was low, melodious and plaintive—in the last respect alone suited to the style of her remarks. In appearance she was a ladylike person, small, with black hair and gray eyes. Her face wore an anxious expression. I sat looking at her, and wondered it did not occur to her to introduce Miss Fannie, and to offer some excuse for having kept me waiting. Neither

thought, it was evident, had entered her mind, and she continued her conversation with her daughter :

"Fannie, I have begged you to keep house : I can't do it. I have my little children to look after."

"Yes, and they are all you care for : they are the most spoilt children I ever saw."

Could it be her own mother the girl was speaking to ? I sat in a state of bewilderment. Yet the words did not sound as they would have done from other voices. They were uttered in a tone of indifference, not of harshness or ill-nature.

"Well, I know one thing: this parlor is not going to be fixed until I do it myself." With that Miss Fannie continued her work of quietly assorting books, and spoke no more, while Mrs. Charlton turned to me and began a conversation about our mutual friend, recalling to my mind many persons and times of "long ago;" and very pleasantly the next hour passed. She was quite a well-informed woman, had lived in various places and had seen much of society, but she was very visionary.

When I rose to take leave, I made some excuse for calling so soon, stating my desire to be of use and offering the aid of one or two servants in putting the house to rights.

Here Fannie spoke up (having followed us into the hall) :

"Plenty of servants here."

"How is it, then, Fannie, we can get nothing done? I have wanted my curtains put up ever since I came. When I ask Billy, he says he's too busy; John is always off somewhere: Laura made him get out the carriage and take her to ride yesterday at the very time I wanted him to go in search of some milk for baby."

"Well," I said, trying to get away, "I live just opposite—there; and it will give me pleasure to do anything I can for you. Do not hesitate to send to me."

I shook hands with both mother and daughter, thinking I was off. Just as I got to the end of the front gallery, however, Mrs. Charlton asked,

"How long have you lived here?"

"Since the first month after my marriage—not quite fifteen years."

"Just what I have always told Mr. Charlton. I wanted a home where I could stay all the time. I ought to have one: I have plenty of money."

What could I say? I was in haste to get home: I had many things to do that forenoon, and the sun, as I felt but too sensibly, was already blazing overhead.

"Is Mr. Charlton in D——?" I asked.

"Oh dear! no. He never thinks how much trouble it is to me to move. Just as we were ready to start he took it into his head to go somewhere, and wanted me to wait. I couldn't: everything was packed, so I came without him." She laughed; of which I took advantage, laughed too, bowed, and walked quickly away.

That afternoon she sent her three youngest children over to see me under the charge of two nurses. The baby came first—a very fine boy, about three months old; soon afterward a girl of about five years, with a boy two years younger. They were all extremely fair, but oh so spoilt and passionate! Baby was asleep, so his nurse took her seat on the gallery and kept him quiet: I was sitting in the hall, near the front door, with my little visitors by me.

The girl was very talkative ; said her name was "Missy;" that she liked her new home very much ; that the children, as she styled her brothers, were very bad; and that sister Laura was going to whip them if they went into her room. Here her nurse, who was standing behind her chair, interrupted her by saying, "And you too." The little lady curled up her nose, and continued: "I tell you they never bother sis Laura like they do sis Fan."

"Hush, Missy," said the nurse: "you talk too much."

She jumped down and pushed the nurse out of the room, but instead of returning to her seat, began running about the hall, going finally into the dining-room, where she found a plate of little tea-cakes: she helped herself

and brought one to her brother. When they had eaten these they went for more, and so continued until the last cake was finished.

Toward evening two young ladies came in, Louise and Emma Raiman, sisters of my next-door neighbor, and my own most intimate friends.

"Mrs. Stone," exclaimed Louise, "we come out of curiosity, as I may as well confess at once: we want to hear about our new neighbors. Of course, the whole town knows you called on them this morning."

"Yes," I answered, "I did, but I can't tell you much. I know there are two young ladies, so you will have an addition to society. I only saw one, however, and as she was in deshabille, I shall not decide upon her appearance."

"When would you advise us to call?—very soon?"

"Not for a few days: they are terribly upset as yet."

"Couldn't we assist them?" asked the impulsive Louise.

"No, no: you can do them no good. So soon as they are at all settled I will go with you to call. Henry can go at the same time—perhaps some others." We sat together on the front doorsteps and whiled away the last hours of a fine autumn evening with harmless gossip, the conversation wandering to divers topics, but always returning to those new neighbors, who were at present the chief objects of interest and curiosity. We had heard, in an indirect way, before the receipt of my friend's letter, that they were qualified to mix with the very best society our town afforded, and though we prided ourselves upon being exclusive, yet an addition could not be otherwise than welcome. But was this a real acquisition? All that I had seen only tended to puzzle me. They were odd people, that was clear—very odd.

CHAPTER II.

SUNDAY passed: the Charltons were not at church, and my conscience

pricked me for not having offered them my pew.

On Tuesday evening I had arranged to call on them again, in company with Emma and Louise, my sober step-son, Henry Stone, and my mirth-loving cousin, Will Maury. I had seen Miss Fannie in the morning, and told her to expect company after tea. She and myself had become somewhat sociable, but of Miss Laura I had never had a glimpse, except from across the street.

When we entered the parlor she was seated at the piano looking over some songs, and never moved while my companions were presented to her sister, who then, after a very general introduction, turned away to talk to Henry Stone.

Laura seemed about nineteen, and was certainly a beautiful girl—tall and graceful, with golden hair, gray eyes and an exquisitely fair skin. Her features and form seemed moulded after the most regular pattern. Her dress was as perfect as her person—in the extreme of the fashion, but very elegant and becoming.

Fannie was much more negligently dressed than her sister, yet she too was not unattractive, despite her want of beauty. She talked vivaciously, sang charmingly and made herself generally entertaining. Laura, on the other hand, was stately and somewhat ceremonious. She had the singularly sweet voice which appeared to belong to the family, and which formed their fascination. She had also the same air of indifference on occasions when a more gracious manner would have been befitting. Mrs. Charlton did not make her appearance, and in answer to an inquiry whether she were well, Miss Laura only vouchsafed a careless "Oh yes."

An item of information which came out in regard to the family was that there were two other children, twin boys, about twelve years old.

We left early, and I invited the Misses Raiman into my house to partake of a cold collation.

"I declare, mother," said Henry Stone as we sat round the dining-table,

"your friends are odd people. I never so much as heard what that pretty girl's name was. Miss Fannie is clever, and I am anticipating fine times this winter. We have agreed to wake up old D—."

"Not a difficult task if *you* learn to frolic," said Will Maury: "that fact will be sufficient for a sensation."

Henry did not answer directly, but continued in a light tone—

"She was telling me how many dashes she had the week before leaving her old home."

"Dashes!" exclaimed all the little party: "pray what are they?"

"Don't you know?"

"No indeed!"

"Guess!"

"Can't—give it up."

"Horseback rides."

All laughed but myself. I didn't like either the slang or the tone of the remarks, and soon turned the conversation to another topic. What had Miss Charlton said to lead Henry Stone to speak lightly of a lady?

Time passed: the Charltons had got comfortably settled at last, had rented a pew just in front of mine, and had received and returned the visits of many of our most respectable families. Mr. Charlton, however, did not arrive. I asked Fannie one morning, when she came to return some books, when she expected her father.

With a most indifferent look she replied,

"Don't know—when he is ready, I suppose, but it takes him a long time to get ready."

Christmas came, and on the following evening I had a party, given expressly for the Misses Charlton. I made every exertion to have it stylish, and they certainly contributed to that object by not coming till after eleven o'clock.

I was not very well pleased at this, and Henry, I saw, was still more put out. But then he had had two or three disappointments that day, the first being the non-arrival of his brother from college, on whose gayety he had count-

ed for much of the amusement during the evening.

When the first dance was to begin Henry took out Fannie. He had been very attentive to her during the autumn, and this seemed a strong additional indication of a settled preference. I hinted as much to him after the dance.

"No, mother," he replied: "you are wrong this time. I hesitated myself, but gave her the precedence as the eldest."

"I am satisfied," I said, and went into the supper-room to see how the table looked. While there I heard some one walking in the side gallery. It was a cold night, and this gallery was on the north side of the house. I opened the glass door as the footsteps approached it, and beheld Laura Charlton and Will Maury.

"Come in, Will," I said. "I thought you had too much consideration to ask a young lady to walk in such a cold gallery."

He laughed, but she did not, and said,

"I am not afraid—I never take cold."

I went back to the parlors, where Emma Raiman told me they were trying to get up a dance of which no one knew the music but Laura Charlton.

"Where is she?" I asked.

"No one knows."

"Come here, Emma," I whispered: "go into the dining-room by yourself, and make Laura come in from the gallery: she has been absent too long."

She went, and returned with Laura, who very amiably played as long as she was asked to. Her execution was very brilliant. Will took a seat by me, and I scolded him for his thoughtlessness.

"Now, Cousin Katherine," he said, "don't blame me, when the lady was as willing as myself."

"Will, what is it to be—a flirtation or an engagement?"

"Heaven bless me if I know: she acknowledged that her heart was her own, but of her little hand I could ascertain nothing. I know one thing—she gets a bouquet every morning from

Henry. She doesn't know who sends it, nor does the bearer."

"Who takes it?"

"Don't know! Henry thinks himself very sly, but I know this for a certainty. However, I am going to ride with her to-morrow, if the weather will permit." (The Charlton girls, in deference to me, had left off talking of "dashes.")

"I should think there were girls enough in the town," I said, "to make rivalry unnecessary."

"Well, you know Henry can't be in earnest: Irene Williams is still alive."

"Remember, she is Henry's ward, not his betrothed," I answered, somewhat sternly. "I have often asked you not to speak of her in this manner."

"I never do except to you, believe me; and I have not heard Henry mention her name for a long time. I wish Decatur would come."

"So do we all. I can't think what has detained him."

"One thing more, Cousin Katherine: is Emma Raiman going to marry Mr. Pennington?"

"I do not feel sure," I replied; and soon afterward supper was announced. Henry took in Laura—Will went alone.

After they had all got to dancing again, Mrs. Charlton came in. Of course I pressed her to take some refreshments. As she was eating she remarked:

"How comfortably you are situated! Your house has every convenience."

"Yes," I replied: "I am constantly having something done to add to the comfort of it, but it is well built, and worth all the improvements."

"Ah, your property is so well managed: you can get money as you want it. You don't know what it is to be put to constant trouble, not because you have not got it, but because you have no one to take care of it."

"Very true: I am spared many annoyances."

"Was your husband a good manager?"

"Yes, it was the same during his lifetime. He used to say, 'Always have your worldly affairs in order, so that when you come to die no earthly

troubles may distract your thoughts from the great Hereafter.' He carried out his maxim, and left everything so arranged that I have never had the least embarrassment. I have realized the wish he expressed on his deathbed: 'Katherine, you will never know money-troubles, I trust.'

"When my aunt died," returned Mrs. Charlton, "she left me her property, little thinking of the trouble and vexation I should have with it. If I say a word to Mr. Charlton about the management of it, he gets provoked and tells me to find an agent who will be my servant as well. I do not mean to affront him when I ask questions or complain of irregularities, but he seems always to think I do, and so things go on from year to year. And—and I have other troubles you don't know of, that fret me."

I felt sorry for her, but could not think her blameless. There was plainly a want of congeniality between herself and her husband. Of his whereabouts neither she nor the girls ever gave the slightest hint; and though they spoke of him frequently, it was always in a tone of supreme indifference.

The party broke up, and all went home apparently in high spirits. As to myself, I felt depressed. Never had I seen so much flirting carried on, and I lamented the change which these new people, with their ultra fashions, had brought into our little circle.

"They are extremists," said Will, with one of his comical looks.

CHAPTER III.

JUST after breakfast next morning, Emma Raiman came in to talk over the party.

"Tell me, Emma," I said, "what has come over Henry? Do you think he is really in love with Fannie Charlton?"

"Fannie Charlton, Miss Katherine!" (her familiar name for me): "you surely mean Laura?"

"No, Emma;" and I punched the fire to give energy, I suppose, to my words.

"Well, here I have been thinking he was terribly in love with Laura, and you think it is Fannie! I begin to fear he will turn out a regular flirt."

"It will not be anything to his credit."

"Miss Katherine, do you know with whom he went home last night?"

"No."

"I can tell you. Mr. Pennington went home with me, but told me he had taken Fannie home first, and that when they got to Mrs. Charlton's gallery, Henry and Laura were sitting on the steps. It was more than half an hour after Henry had left your parlor, and Laura had gone out before him. I know, too, he sends her a bouquet every morning; so if you miss your hot-house flowers, you can guess where they go to."

I did not answer, for I hardly knew how to continue the conversation without betraying Will's confidence: as he and Emma were close friends, doubtless he had told her about the bouquets. It was my rule never to repeat gossip; hence I enjoyed the confidence of all my young associates—and I had many—and often I had the opportunity of giving advice and keeping the young people out of mischief.

After a short silence I asked how Henry sent bouquets so secretly.

"Some time ago, late one evening, I was sitting in our upper verandah. Mr. Stone was walking in your front garden: now and then he would stop and fasten up a vine, but he had the air of waiting for some one. After a while he went to the front corner of the garden, next to ours, where you know there is a large cedar tree. It seemed to me he just had time to walk round the tree and stroll back to the house. 'That's funny!' I thought. The next evening he was in there again, and I distinctly saw a small bouquet in his hand. Afterward I saw him there frequently; and one evening, when I had seen him walk toward the cedar tree with a bouquet, I hurried down stairs, called a servant to follow me, hastened here under the excuse of seeing you about some unimportant matter, and thus met Mr. Stone coming toward the house—without the

bouquet. When I went home it was dark, and I could make no observation; but one day, when you and I were in the garden, and I knew Henry was not at home, I slipped round the tree—which stands close to our fence and completely overshadows the corner—and found a little shelf under a slanting plank, not visible from the street, yet so situated that a person passing could reach anything laid on the shelf. About the same time I began to notice pretty little bouquets at the Charltons': I teased Laura about them until one day she told me, in confidence, that she did not know from whom they came, and had as much curiosity on the point as I had. I found out, however, that their cook brought them to her, as she came from market; so, keeping a sharp lookout, I soon after saw the woman take them from the corner of your fence, and thus I discovered Mr. Henry Stone's secret."

"You must admit that your curiosity has been carried rather far," I remarked, settling it in my mind that it was she who had furnished Will Maury with his information.

"Not more so than, as a woman, I am privileged to carry it," was the reply.

A short silence followed. What I had just heard fell like a weight upon my heart. Yet I was not greatly surprised. For some days I had felt a presentiment that our intercourse with the Charltons would lead to something more than a mere intimate acquaintance. I could not discuss the subject with Emma, and, to avert any questions or conjectures, turned the conversation to her own concerns.

"What have you to tell me of Mr. Pennington?" I asked.

"I wish I could say 'Nothing'; but you may as well know that the last chapter but one in our engagement has been read."

"What will the finale be?—white lace and orange flowers?"

"No, indeed — willow and cypress perhaps."

"Why, Emma what is the matter?"

She got up, and as she tied on her bonnet, said, nervously,

"I could not stand everything; so I told him the Christmas present he spoke of making me would not be acceptable, and— Oh, well! the long and short of it is that he goes with me to parties, and there his attentions end; but so soon as I can get something tangible that brother will listen to, I shall put an end to the affair for ever."

I could offer only the commonplace advice to do nothing rashly, but consider well before taking a decisive step. When she left me I returned to my room and thought over what I had heard. There was trouble ahead—of what nature precisely I could not feel sure, though I knew well the source whence it was to spring. Here were two young girls, one beautiful, both attractive, with the further advantages of money and position, striving by every device to captivate all the men around them. Should I call their conduct criminal many would pronounce me censorious. Yet the consequences were likely to prove bitter, and in anticipation were already so to myself.

Henry was only my step-son, but very dear to me for his father's sake. I had devoted my life to him. From the time of his leaving college—about five years after my marriage—almost every hour he could spare from his profession—the law—had been spent in my society. We had read together, making a systematic study of general literature. Thus I had learned to know him well: I knew his tastes and principles, and I felt convinced that if he were in earnest in his attentions to either of the Misses Charlton, success would not add to his happiness. Yet I could not bear to think he was trifling. It was beneath him—inconsistent with his character and dignified conduct.

I was interrupted by the entrance of the object of my thoughts.

"The train is in again," he said, "but Decatur is not aboard."

"Perhaps he has changed his mind and will not come home."

"He should at least have written, for he must have known we should be anxious." After a pause, he continued:

"Mother, that masquerade party at the Charltons' comes off to-night, and I haven't a thing prepared."

"Why not stay at home?"

"I should have no objection," he answered promptly. "But what is the matter, mother? You look blue."

"I am thinking of last night and you young folks. I never saw so much flirting in my life."

"You can't blame me for any of it."

"How so? Who was it danced four times successively with Fannie Charlton?"

"Oh, she's the best dancer. But surely you don't censure a little flirting at a party?"

"I never was prudish, and I know young people like to frolic, but when a girl absents herself from a ball-room for over an hour in a dark gallery not open to the guests, it does not look well."

"Who did that?"

"Laura Charlton was the girl, but you need not know the gentleman's name."

"You disapprove of promenading?"

"No! After a dance it does very well, but I think it should take place only in a lighted gallery or hall. You danced four times with Fannie, and Mr. Pennington three times with Laura, during two of which his betrothed sat and looked on. You can excuse yourself by saying you are not engaged, but he cannot, and Emma Raiman is worth twenty such girls as the Charltons."

"I declare I had not thought so seriously of what passed. I was carried away by excitement, though I felt several times that something was wrong. But for nothing am I so sorry as for something you do not know—going home with Miss Laura and sitting on the front steps for half an hour."

"I knew it, but did not mention it, because I felt sure your conscience must tell you it was wrong."

"It happened thus: When we got to the steps she said, 'Oh, I am so tired!' I said, 'Well, let us rest,' and to my astonishment she took a seat on the steps. There was nothing for me to do but to sit down beside her."

"I do not see that. But you are all alike, and it is useless to talk. Go to the masque party : I intend going myself."

"Only the gentlemen are to be disguised. They are to meet and go together."

"Can you not manage so that I can

join them in the dress of a necromancer? Not more than one person besides yourself must know anything of it."

He undertook to gratify my whim—of which he did not suspect the object—and went out to make the necessary arrangements.



CHAPTER IV.

AT nine o'clock a party met on the steps of the town-hall, each person giving the password to one who stood on the lowest step, and who answered "Frigid" to the "Zone" of the twenty-nine others.

At Mrs. Charlton's hall door the same formality was observed, and all but one thought that thirty gentlemen were entering the ball-room. We marched two and two, as motley a crowd as ever was seen at an impromptu masquerade-party. The rooms were full of ladies, and we were received with every demonstration of joy. Having paraded the rooms two or three times, we broke ranks and darted toward the ladies in every direction. An uproar followed, with running, laughter and screams, but the band struck up a lively strain, and in a few moments all had found partners and the dancing began. Meantime, I had caught Laura by the hand, and now drew her into a corner.

She followed with an air of curiosity, asking what I wanted of her.

"I am going to tell your fortune."

"I don't wish to hear it."

"I can tell you something that will convince you of my knowledge."

"No, you can't."

"I can tell you who sends you a bouquet every morning."

"Who are you?"

"Do you want to know who sends the bouquet?"

"Yes, yes!"

"It is Henry Stone."

The blood rushed to her face, but quickly recovering, she exclaimed, "You are not Mr. Stone?"

I stood up, laughing: "I am five feet three, and he can't be less than six feet. Do you love him, Laura?"

"I don't know."

"Does he love you?"

"I don't know."

"Why, what is the matter?"

She sprang up: "I'm afraid of you—let me go."

The next moment I was alone. I had failed in the object which had brought me to the party, but I must not show my disappointment; so, crossing the room, I took my seat by a gentle little girl and told her a romantic string of nonsense.

Two or three masqueraders came up and had their fortunes told, but suddenly I felt a pinch on my arm (the preconcerted signal between Henry and myself that it was time for me to leave); so, glancing around, I said, "What do you want?"

"I want *my* fortune told, but not here: you must come with me."

Some objections were raised, but promising to return in fifteen minutes, we repaired to the hall. We walked down it toward the back door, and the next instant the lamp was out. Henry hastened with me through the back door and along the gallery to the kitchen, where a girl stood waiting, to whom I was resigned, while he made the best of his way back to the hall. In a short time I reached home, the servant having conducted me by a circuitous route.

Once safe in the sitting-room, I threw off most of my disguise, then opened a door leading into the library, where a young man was awaiting my arrival. It was Mr. Addison, one of the thirty, who had given me his place for a time. He was engaged to a lady who had left town for the holidays, and, not being Charlton-mad, parties were not quite so enchanting to him as to some others.

"Returned," I said, entering the room. "Make the best of your way over: I have fled like Cinderella, leaving the company in commotion."

I followed him to the gallery, and stood some time trying to see if he got unnoticed. I could see lights moving about Mrs. Charlton's house and yard: the music was hushed, and ever and anon loud peals of laughter came from the parlors.

On the next morning, about seven o'clock, the nurse came running over to say "that baby was ill, and wouldn't Mrs. Stone please come over and see what had best be done?"

Of course I hurried, and when I went into the nursery found the little fellow in a high fever and covered with a rash. Mrs. Charlton was sitting by the nurse crying, and it was very evident that nothing had been done for the little sufferer. The two other small children were running about the room barefooted and partially dressed. I examined the baby and applied some simple remedies, but advised its mother to send at once for a physician. I had seen a good deal of sickness, though I never had a little darling of my own to care for, and I knew this child was very ill with scarlet fever.

"For whom shall I send?"

"Have you had no medical advice since you came here?" I asked, rather cautiously.

"Yes, but who is your physician, Mrs. Stone?"

"Dr. Cartwright."

"Do you recommend him as the best? Do you think I had better send for him?"

The fear of responsibility led me to give an indirect answer: "I always have Dr. Cartwright, for he has been very successful in my family, but there are others of equal merit. Whom have you called in?"

"Dr. Pennant has been attending my washerwoman: he comes every morning at nine. I'll wait until he comes."

"Had you not better send for him to call earlier to-day?"

"Well, I can. Nurse, tell James to go for him."

When the nurse returned, Mrs. Charlton left the room, saying she would go and dress. I did what I thought was

best for the baby, and had the other children dressed, by which time Dr. Pennant had arrived.

He made a low bow at the door, then advanced shyly to the fireplace, where he stood looking down at the child as it lay in my lap. I had never seen him before, and on a different occasion should have found his appearance irresistibly comical. He was very small, with bushy hair, blinking eyes, and a mouth which assumed a singular twist whenever he opened it. He kept his hands during most of the time stuffed in his pockets. After asking innumerable questions, he pronounced the disease scarlet fever just as Mrs. Charlton opened the door. She looked horrified.

"Don't be frightened," I said: "there has been a good deal of it in town, but of a mild character."

Most of the day, and all night, I watched by the little sufferer, who grew gradually worse. How I wished for Dr. Cartwright, and reproached myself for not having counseled Mrs. Charlton to send for him! Then a little calm reflection would assure me I had acted for the best.

When the bright morning sun broke through the eastern window I felt greatly relieved; for, "Certainly," I thought, "Mrs. Charlton will see her baby is no better, and will have another physician."

She did not, however, propose it, and I was forced to tell her that I considered the child in great danger.

She sprang up, and glared at me like a maniac, but her voice never lost its singular plaintiveness, even in her excitement, as she exclaimed, hysterically, "Why did you not tell me Dr. Pennant was not a good physician?"

"Mrs. Charlton," I said, as calmly as possible, "I have brought no charge against Dr. Pennant, and have no wish to disparage him. But as *your friend* I considered it my duty to tell you your baby was no better, and thus give you an opportunity to do more for him while yet there is time. If I were in your place, when Dr. Pennant comes I should ask him to call in another physician in consultation."

Before I had ceased speaking she was perfectly quiet, answering in her usual indifferent manner: "Oh, it is not necessary to consult Dr. Pennant about having another doctor. After he leaves I will send for Dr. Cartwright."

I remonstrated against this, but in vain, and finding her heedless of all objections, I went home, determined not to be present when Dr. Pennant called.

CHAPTER V.

HENRY and I met at a late breakfast that morning. It was the first meal we had taken together since the party.

"Good-morning," he said cheerfully as I entered the dining-room. "I thought you had forsaken home for the Charltons."

"Not quite. I don't fancy them so much as you do. I go there out of charity, and you for—"

"Love," he answered, moodily.

I related what had happened, and mentioned my fear of unpleasant as well as sad results. He listened attentively, and then asked why I had remained all night, when there were two grown daughters in the family.

"Henry," I said, gravely, "would you believe it, those girls had company until midnight, and then retired without coming near the nursery?"

He made no answer, and I felt a miserable conviction that nothing I could say or do would open his eyes to their real characters. After a short pause I inquired if there had been any letters the day before.

"Yes, two to me—one from Decatur. He is not coming home: he has accepted an invitation to join a hunting-party. He says, as he graduates in June, and will then be coming home for good, he prefers to spend his vacation in this way. My other letter was from my little girl, and I must go and see her. Let me see. To-day is Saturday: I will start on Monday afternoon."

"How old is your *little girl*?" I asked with an emphasis.

"Fifteen—no, sixteen—this coming February. I can't realize it! I always think of her as a little girl, and haven't seen her for over two years."

"She will want some dresses, but I will see to that. You had better provide a present for her."

He rose to go to his office, and as he passed me put his arm round my waist and said, "How little did I think that night father brought you here a bride, and I called you 'mother' in fun, that I should grow to love you so well!"

I kissed him affectionately, but felt very sad. Every proof of his goodness and tenderness of heart only made it more unbearable to think of him as married to so selfish a woman as Laura Charlton.

About the middle of the day I returned to Mrs. Charlton's. The door was opened by an elderly gentleman, who held a paper in his hand. We bowed, and I passed on to the nursery, at the door of which I paused and glanced round at the stranger. He had sunk down into a chair in the hall, apparently absorbed in his paper.

Entering the nursery, I found Mrs. Charlton sitting by the crib, looking very miserable. I drew a chair up to her side and inquired about the baby.

"He is going to die."

"Why do you think so? Has he grown so much worse since I left?"

"I don't know, but Dr. Pennant says there is no chance for him now, since that medicine was not given regularly last night."

I started: "What does he mean, Mrs. Charlton?"

"I don't know: he talked a great deal this morning, and I have sent for Dr. Cartwright."

"Did you inform Dr. Pennant of your intention?"

"No: I did not think it necessary."

I felt tempted to leave the house, but it seemed uncharitable after her sending for me, and at times appearing to trust me so much.

Very soon Dr. Cartwright was announced. He examined the child, asking what had been done. I gave him

an account, and concluded by saying, "Dr. Pennant left two prescriptions last evening, telling me to give No. 1 until the fever rose above a certain pulsation, and then to change to No. 2. I did so, and this morning he told Mrs. Charlton, when I was not present, that there was no chance for her baby, because the first medicine had not been continued."

"Let me see the two medicines, Mrs. Stone." I handed them to him: he examined them carefully, and then turned to the child: "An hour hence I will give you my opinion, Mrs. Charlton." He seated himself beside the crib and watched patiently and silently during the next hour.

As there was nothing I could do, I went up stairs to see what Fannie and Laura were about. I found Fannie combing her hair, while Laura was sewing trimmings on an evening dress. After talking a little, I asked if either had been present when Dr. Pennant called.

"No," said Fannie: "I haven't been down stairs to-day."

I hinted that I thought the baby was very sick, and added that Missy and her other little brother both looked unwell.

"Just what I expected! Here we are in a strange place, and mother allowed the servants to take those children off, she didn't know where! I'm not surprised that they have scarlet fever."

"Well," I said, "they have got it, and it is useless to talk about how they got it. You will all have plenty to do. I would speak to your mother about them, but she gets so frightened every time I tell her anything, I thought it would be best to tell you and Laura first."

"Do you really think they will have scarlet fever?" asked Laura.

"Yes. Have you both had it?"

"Yes," answered Laura, "but the twins have not."

"You had better keep them away from the nursery."

"Oh mercy!" exclaimed Fannie. "I don't know what we could do with

them: they mind nobody when pa's at home, and he had to come last night, to add to the other ills."

I looked at the girl in silent astonishment.

"Oh, you needn't be surprised at what I say, Mrs. Stone. He will not have been here a week before you will understand what I mean."

"Well, one of you come down presently and get the doctor's directions, for I cannot remain all day, nor come to-night."

I returned to the nursery to wait for the expiration of the hour. I had been seated a few moments when Mrs. Charlton came and sat down by me, asking in a low tone, "Who is your dressmaker?"

To say I was amazed would give but a faint idea of what I felt. I could scarcely collect myself and answer politely, "Mrs. Gent."

"I want my girls to go to some one who will make their things nicely: they always have so much ugly trimming. Yours fit so nice! Is she reasonable in her charges?"

"I think so, but she is not the most fashionable."

During this strange chat I noticed the doctor go to the crib where Missy was asleep and examine her pulse: then turning to me, he asked, "Has this child had scarlet fever?"

"No," I replied.

"Then she should not have been allowed to remain in this room."

"I told mother to send her up stairs last night," said a voice from the door.

The doctor turned quickly to see who the new-comer was.

"How could I, Fannie?" replied Mrs. Charlton. "You were in the parlor when she fell asleep, and I was afraid to leave her up there alone."

"What difference would it have made? Ellen could have put her to bed, and she would have known nothing."

I got up and went to the baby.

"How is he now?" I asked.

"Much better," replied Dr. Cartwright, coming toward me and giving directions for the day.

When he was gone I said, "I can't remain to-day."

"Oh, do not go: I don't want to be left alone."

"Lor, mother! here's Laura, and I: what is the use of Mrs. Stone's over-fatiguing herself?"

I left with very little ceremony.

Next morning I sent to inquire, and the servant brought me word that the baby was out of danger, but that both Missy and the little boy had taken the fever.

Before going to church I went over. Everything was in confusion; so, promising to come back as soon as I returned from church, I left at once. Not supposing any of them intended to come, I did not offer them seats in my carriage. What was my surprise, as I got out, to see Mrs. Charlton's carriage dash up and Miss Laura step out elegantly dressed!

She came home with me, for her carriage did not return in time. Henry was at home and helped us to alight. I hurried in and changed my dress: then coming down I told Laura twice I was ready to start. She did not move, and I went alone.

The children were about the same: Mrs. Charlton was asleep, and Fannie "on duty." Very soon Dr. Cartwright came again. Fannie was out of the room, and he told me frankly that Eddie was in great danger: the brain was affected, and he feared congestion.

"What do you think of the other two?"

"They will get along very well with a little care, but Missy has had too much to eat this morning."

"Doctor, dine with me to-day, at four o'clock: I have something to tell you about these children."

"I will—thank you!"

He left, and when Fannie returned I got up, saying,

"I must go now: I will send Laura home; but I should like to see your mother if she is awake?"

"Yes; she is in the dining-room with pa: go right in, Mrs. Stone."

I did so, and was introduced to Mr.

Charlton, a tall, grave man, whom I had no time to notice more particularly.

"Mrs. Charlton," I said, "I have come to tell you that Dr. Cartwright dines with me to-day, when I intend telling him that Dr. Pennant also visits your children. As I recommended Dr. Cartwright, I consider it due to him to tell him this, for the two are not working together, and so may do serious damage to one of their patients."

Mrs. Charlton looked confused, but her husband said sharply,

"What! employing two doctors?"

"You know nothing about it, Mr. Charlton. Dr. Cartwright is the physician, while Dr. Pennant is my friend, and merely advises."

"Very well," I said: "good-morning." I left the room disgusted. When I got home I told Laura she was needed and must go at once. It is useless to add that I made a communication to Dr. Cartwright as I had intended. He sat with me till he saw Dr. Pennant go into Mrs. Charlton's gate, about eight o'clock, and then followed him.

An hour later Mrs. Charlton and Laura came over to me. The former was very gracious:

"Mrs. Stone, I fear I was rude to-day, but do come over. Eddie will die if not well nursed: no one can take your place."

Henry was present, and answered for me: "Mother is not much used to sitting up, and I am afraid she will be sick."

Mrs. Charlton, however, looked so wretched that I said, "No, Henry, I will take care of myself, and if I can be of any use to the poor child, I will go."

Another long night of watching. Missy slept most of the time, and the baby had its regular nurse, so my attention was given principally to little Eddie, who lay very ill—not asleep, but unconscious. Toward morning he grew rapidly worse. I went up stairs and woke Laura, telling her he was sinking, and that she had better call her mother.

"Oh no: mother has been up so much, crying and worrying, let her rest."

"But she would rather be with him if

He is to die. I think yours is a mistaken kindness, Laura."

"Sister," said she, calling to Fannie, "would you wake mother?"

"No: what's the use?"

"Laura," said I, "send for Dr. Cartwright immediately."

"You had better send for Mr. Rushton if you think he is dying," said Fannie: "he has never been christened."

"Well, do so, but, Laura, are you willing to take all this responsibility on yourself?"

"Of course."

I returned to the nursery. Laura soon came in, half dressed, and in due time Mr. Rushton arrived; nor was it long before Dr. Cartwright followed. He told me things were as he had anticipated, and that he had prepared Mrs. Charlton the night before to expect this; so I whispered to Mr. Rushton, "Baptize him at once: he can't last very long now."

"What name?"

"Eddington," said Laura.

During the last half hour the fever had abated: I gave the little sufferer a spoonful of wine-whey, and soon afterward he looked up, perfectly rational. Mr. Rushton whispered to me, "He is conscious: speak to him."

I knelt down close to the child, and said, "Don't you want to be a little angel, darling?" (I had heard him try to sing with Missy,

"I want to be an angel,"

so hoped he would remember it, and he did.)

"Yes." His voice was growing fainter.

"God has sent for you to come to heaven, have bright wings, and be a little angel."

"I'll go."

Here Laura burst out crying, and hid her face near the child's pillow. He closed his little eyes wearily, but only for a moment, yet he never spoke again. I found Mrs. Charlton and Fannie were both in the room. They were crying, but so quietly that I doubted whether they were aware of Eddie's condition. He breathed slowly a few

moments longer, then Dr. Cartwright closed the eyes, saying, "The angel is in heaven."

The morning light streamed in on the dead, but did not seem intrusive. There was no loud grief to be suppressed. Mrs. Charlton cried a good deal, and Laura sat mute and subdued. Fannie helped me to lay out the child, and was very efficient, displaying her usual sangfroid and giving no outward token of feeling.

When Missy awoke, I wrapped a blanket around her and took her on my lap: she soon missed Eddie and asked for him.

"He has gone to heaven to be an angel, Missy."

"I want to go too: he knew I did, and it wasn't fair to go when I was asleep."

"Why, would you go and leave mamma? She is crying now because Eddie has gone, and would cry so much more if you were to go also."

"Well, I always go out when Eddie does. I never stole away and left him; and he knew I wanted to be an angel."

"But, my dear little girl, you must wait until God sends for you: don't you know we must obey God?"

"Did he send for Eddie?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll wait."

"That's a good girl. Now, don't try to get out of bed to-day. Be good and I'll send you your breakfast, and there shall be a pretty doll on the waiter for you."

At ten o'clock I received a telegram from Henry: it read as follows:

"Can't make arrangements for I. W. Come if you can: I am waiting at the Junction. Don't be alarmed."

This was not very intelligible, but I could not go then, and despatched the following answer:

"Come home now: will go with you next week."

He returned home next morning. In the afternoon I went back to Mrs. Charlton's to see what arrangements had been made for the funeral. I found

Laura and Dr. Pennant in the parlor looking at Eddie, while Dr. Cartwright sat at a side table making out the certificate.

There had evidently been words before I came between the two doctors, for Dr. Pennant asked in his nervous way, "Did you put down scarlet fever?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think, as we can't agree, there had better be a post-mortem examination and an inquest."

Dr. Cartwright got up from his seat very angrily, and walking up to the little man, said, sternly, "If ever you mention such a thing again, in connection with a patient of mine, I'll slap your face the first time we meet in a crowd."

"My professional honor is at stake, sir."

"Sign your name and let me be done with you."

The miserable little man walked to the table and did as he was ordered. I was amazed, but before I could recover myself, I heard Laura remark, "If I were Dr. Pennant, I should sue Dr. Cartwright for defamation of character."

"Miss Charlton, that is very dangerous advice to give," said Dr. Cartwright, calmly. "But I wish you good-evening." He then turned to Dr. Pennant: "Doctor, this is the first time I have ever recognized you as a physician, or allowed my name to be on the same page with yours, and it will certainly be the last."

So soon as he was out of hearing, Dr. Pennant began a tirade about his professional honor, the insult he had received, and similar matters; all of which I cut short with—"There is a time and place for everything; but this, Dr. Pennant, is not the place to defend yourself, nor are you accountable to me: moreover, I wish to hear nothing more that you can say."

Pretty soon Fannie and her mother came in, and having learned when the funeral would take place, I went to the nursery.

Missy was sitting up in bed, with very little fever.

"Oh, Mrs. Stone! nurse says Eddie is dead: is he? Didn't you say he had gone to heaven to be an angel?"

I was silent. Could the child have so entirely misunderstood me? Had she no idea of heaven in connection with death? "Missy, don't you know you can only go to heaven by dying?" She looked puzzled. "So little Eddie was so sick our good God sent for him to come to heaven, and he went by dying. You mustn't cry: you must be a good girl, and one of these days He will send for you."

I saw nothing of Henry till after the funeral. He came in with the question: "Mother, what's to pay over the way?" "How?"

"Why, that ninny, Dr. Pennant, came to me to get my advice about suing for defamation of character."

"What did you tell him?"

"I advised him to hold his tongue: he hasn't the shadow of a showing against Dr. Cartwright."

"What about Irene, Henry?"

"She seems very unhappy, but I can tell you little about it. It was night when I got to L—, and I waited until morning before going to the academy. After I sent in for her it was nearly an hour before she made her appearance. Her manners were constrained, her eyes swollen from crying, but not one word could I get from her as to the cause."

"I asked her if she would like to go to ride in the afternoon, and she looked up so pained and distressed—replying, 'I would—but—I can't'—that I was utterly at a loss to comprehend her. The necklace I had taken with me seemed to please her, but she asked me to take it back and put it away for her. 'No,' I said, 'wear it: no matter if you should lose it.' She insisted; so here it is. The teachers all gave good accounts of her—said she studied well and practiced hard. I left her without any definite idea of what to do; but, as I thought about the matter that night, her unhappy look worried me. School is all the home she has at present, and

I feel it is my duty to endeavor to make her contented and cheerful. That is why I asked you to come, thinking if we were to get her away from the academy, we could better understand the young lady."

"Has she grown much?"

"Very much: she is tall, but somewhat slight. By the by, her hands are uncommonly pretty."

"I will go with you, willingly, next week, when I have got over my fatigue. There can be no reason why you shouldn't know all that concerns Irene. No doubt something is wrong, but it will probably turn out a very trifling matter."

"The more trifling the more easily remedied."

It seemed to me that he was striving to do his duty by his ward, without finding any pleasure in the task. "Thinking so much of Laura," I concluded, "he can't give poor little Irene the attention that is due to her."

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER a delightful trip of thirty-six hours we reached L—— on the 6th of January. It was a little country town, and its quiet was very refreshing to me after the excitement of the last few weeks. There was not much else in the way of attraction. The female academy, situated at one extremity of the place, was all that gave it importance. The visitors to the institution were sufficiently frequent to support a hotel.

Directly after breakfast we got a country carriage and proceeded to the school.

"Get Irene," I said, "and we will take a ride through these woods. It will be pleasant to us all, and her reserve will wear off before we speak of anything serious."

He did so, and led her out to the carriage, where I sat waiting. The introduction was awkward enough: I had never before seen her.

She was, indeed, pale and slight:

there was a haggard look about her sweet face that was very touching. She was painfully shy and reserved, but this did not displease me: nothing could be more unlike the manners of boarding-school girls in general.

The drive was a very agreeable one: the air was cool and bracing, and the roads were splendid. We talked of everything except school. When we reached the hotel I took Irene to my room, where a bright wood-fire was burning cheerily. I made her sit beside me and tell me of her occupations, watching, meanwhile, for any faltering which might afford a clew to her trouble. She spoke unreservedly of her studies, but when I went a step farther and asked about her life among her schoolmates, she relapsed into silence. I drew her close to my side. "Irene," I said, "you are unhappy: come, tell me what is the matter—tell me as your friend. If you have any sorrow or have committed any fault, confide in me and you shall have all my sympathy. Do not fear that I shall deride you, or that I shall not be lenient in my judgment."

Her head sank on my shoulder, and she answered slowly, "I am unhappy, but I can hardly tell why, it is so foolish."

"Try and tell me. I have taken this trip merely to see you and make you happy and contented. I know you think you owe Mr. Henry (as you call him) a great deal; so think of that and tell me all, for it has worried him dreadfully to see you so sad."

She began, in a slow, quiet way, which I found was habitual with her: "When Mr. Henry brought me to this school he told me to be obedient to the teachers and friendly with the girls, but never to have an intimate friend—not even to tell them more of myself than that I was an orphan, and that my guardian had put me to school. He wrote often himself—oh such nice long letters, sometimes so amusing! Of course, I never let any one read my letters."

"You were right," I said, encouragingly.

"So I thought. Indeed, Mr. Henry had told me not to let them read my letters. The girls said I was foolish: none of them seemed to like me, and I was almost always alone. Still, they never really troubled me until last summer, when two new scholars came during vacation, who noticed me reading my letters and began teasing me about them. Oh, Mrs. Stone, I can't tell you how they tormented me, but I would never tell them a word. One day they opened my portfolio with a hair-pin, and found a letter and some envelopes directed to Mr. Stone. So they told all through the school that I was engaged, and cared for nothing but reading and writing letters. I denied it, but it was of no use. One of these girls, named May Jordan, came to me one day during recess and asked me to join her play. It was a rough romp, and I refused. She said, 'I know why: you want to read that letter again from your 'precious Stones.' You are a great chit to be thinking of beaux: you had better go to your spelling: I saw a misspelt word in your dictation.' I said, 'May, you know that is not so.' 'Don't you know, Irene,' she answered, 'that it is against the rules to give a girl the lie?' I was provoked, and said, 'I have told you I am not engaged: now you know it will be a falsehood for you to say so again.' Some girls gathered round and took my letter from me, and I was obliged to call to the teacher to make them give it up. May then told her that I had called her a liar, and though I begged to be allowed to explain, she punished me, making me recite ten dictionary columns. Even one such punishment excludes you from the 'good-conduct testimonials.'"

"Why did you not go at once to the principal?"

"The first of the next month she saw my name was off the good-conduct list—so sent for me and the teacher who had punished me. The teacher gave her version of the affair, and Madame said it was disgraceful, and sent me out of the room. Since then I have been miserable—teased by the girls, laughed at

for the disgrace, and ashamed to think I should have no report to send Mr. Henry: this has hurt me most of all."

"I suppose his visit on Christmas was only another source of annoyance?"

"Yes."

I pressed the poor little orphan to my heart. As she told her simple story I could scarcely believe she was nearly sixteen, her manners were so artless, her feelings so childlike. "Irene, you have been shamefully treated: you shall never go back there."

She trembled from suppressed emotion.

"Weep, Irene," I said: "I am sure you have not wept freely for many a day."

"I have had no friend," she said, sobbing, "since mamma left me."

After a time she grew quieter. I got up, laid her head on the sofa cushion and went into the next room, where Henry was reading.

I told him all, putting his own mistakes so glaringly before him as to exclude any notion flattering to his vanity. I blamed him for putting her in a school with the principal of which he had no personal acquaintance, and also for his want of discretion in endeavoring to order her conduct, when he knew nothing of her disposition and character. He said little except to admire her firmness, but asked if I did not think her unusually sensitive.

"I think she will be a true woman," I replied.

We talked then of what should be done with her. After much discussion, he asked if I would take her home with me.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Simply because I will not have so young a girl in my house who is not my daughter."

It was finally arranged that she should go for a time to a distant school, with the principal of which I had once been intimate.

When Irene and I were ready for dinner, Henry came in. I was curious to see how they would meet. He was

always easy and graceful in his manners, and not less so now than on other occasions. He sat down beside her on the sofa, and taking her hands pressed them gently in his, saying, kindly, "Irene, your candid story is more to me than a thousand conduct-medals; so don't think any more of the past, but forgive me the part I have had in making you unhappy."

"Forgive you?"

"Yes, for having so little confidence in you, and for being so foolish as to want concealed what had better have been known. But it is all past now: my 'sensitive flower,' I will guard you more carefully henceforth."

"But, Mr. Henry, it was so ridiculous in those girls to suppose I was to marry my guardian: you are a great deal too old for me, are you not?"

"Yes," said Henry, dryly.

I was amused at the girl's artlessness, but it made me feel more at ease; for, to say truth, Henry was so handsome I was not surprised that silly school-girls should have made a hero of him.

"Irene," he said that evening, "where are your letters? I do not believe they are too good to be opened."

"I haven't any: I had no place to keep them."

"Did you burn them?"

"Nearly all. Here are two in my pocket: they are all I have."

"It was well I kept all your mother's letters for you."

"Yes, indeed! You don't know how hard it is to keep anything at the academy."

"And, Irene, you have endured all this for so long a time, and not complained! Why were you afraid to tell me?"

Here I interposed, for she was ready to cry. I went up to where she sat and laid my hand over her eyes: "Never mind now, Irene: you are too excited to explain. He will understand it all one of these days."

So he did, but only by degrees. He learned in time how deep grief for her mother had tinged her sensitive nature with sadness; how her mind had silently expanded while closed against ordinary influences; how her heart, gentle and pure, instinctively kept hidden treasures of which it was but dimly conscious.



CHAPTER VII.

EMMA RAIMAN was my first visitor after my return home. Mr. Pennington had returned to his allegiance, and, having made a proper acknowledgment of his fault, had been restored to favor. The wedding-day was fixed at no great interval, and she was too busy to stay long with me. She had scarcely gone when Will Maury entered.

"We have had grand times," he burst out. "The way those two doctors have quarreled! ditto Mr. and Mrs. Charlton; and I'm in for it too. Laura says if Henry will give up all claim to her, she'll marry me."

"Henry! What has he to do with her?"

"Don't know, but if he persists I'll run away with her."

"Suppose I prevent that?"

"Now, Cousin Katherine, you know you never tell tales, and you are determined, I can see, that he sha'n't marry a Charlton: she knows it, too, and says that is why she is so willing to play quits."

"You are disgusting!"

"Oh, nonsense! Come, let me tell you a thing or two."

"Talk of yourself and I'll listen."

"That's what I want to do. You know what a poor devil I am: I have been cheated out of my rights ever since I was born. Went to college, studied the flesh off my bones (almost), but some upstart or other got ahead of me, and the old man sent me adrift, because I came out second best in the classical race."

"Tenth or twelfth, if I remember right."

"Well, you don't remember right, but I don't care if it was the fiftieth. Then, every time I get ahead in my business, there's a smash-up, while I've

only to go to see a girl three times for some imp to step in and pop the question, and I am overboard again. Just so soon as I started to see Laura, Henry, who until then was satisfied with Miss Fannie, had to walk in, and I was about *gone* when, luckily for me, he leaves town. 'Make hay while the sun shines,' say I, and I went to work. She's a regular trump, and I'm determined to win her."

"What did you do then, madcap?"

"Well! I remembered to have read somewhere of a fellow who got a girl into a wagon and went flying over roads and stumps like a message on the telegraph wire, and so scared her into marrying him. Acting on the idea, I got a buggy and pair and started out with Miss Laura over the roughest roads in the country. We went like mad, but it didn't scare her the least. At last we came to the top of a hill which I was positively afraid to drive down. 'Give me the ribbons,' she said, and she snatched them before I had time to remonstrate, and drove down straight as an arrow, and so fast that we were three miles from the foot of the hill before I could rein in the horses. I can tell you I felt cheap: I turned and drove home without a word. I found out that wasn't the way to win Miss Laura; so I cursed the fellow that wrote the story, and tried something else. I gave her a hint about a lady whom Henry had gone to see. If jealousy don't rouse a woman, there is no love in the case."

"Did she tell you she would marry you if Henry gave up his claim?"

"Not in so many words, but she implied as much."

"Would you, Will, marry a girl you caught fibbing?"

"About flirting and beaux? Yes, because if I were to put in a proviso on that point, I should never find a bride."

"Look here, boy, go home: I can't stand your disrespect."

"I know what you are hinting at: you don't like Laura, but I do. I know she fibs, for she flirts (it comes to the same thing), but I'll marry her if I can get her. But what I want to know is, will you settle with Henry, or shall I?"

"Do it all yourself, but let me know the result."

Time passed rapidly, and I heard nothing further from Will Maury. I busied myself assisting Emma with her wedding preparations. Fannie Charlton became very sociable, and was often over at my house during the day, where she helped to make cakes and jellies. Laura never came. "Busy making her maid's dress," said the servant when I asked for her on one occasion; and as she was not congenial to me, I didn't care how much she kept out of my sight. Her cold beauty was very captivating, but to me her selfish heart made her very unlovable. Half the men in town were charmed, and she never moved in public without being followed by a throng.

One morning I received a visit from Mr. Charlton. He was elegantly dressed, and rose with much dignity as I entered the parlor:

"Good-morning, madam. I have called—as I should have done long since—for three reasons: first, to pay you the courtesy due you as our nearest neighbor; second, to thank you for your kindness and attention to my family; and lastly, to ask if you would be so good as to relate to me how it happened that there were two physicians to attend my children?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Charlton," I replied, "if I tell you I think it very strange you should ask such an explanation from me."

"Only, madam, because an outsider is better able to give a clear account of what happens in cases of this kind than one so much interested and excited as my wife has been."

I still hesitated, but afterward, when he assured me it would not affect his

conduct toward either of the doctors, I related as nearly as I could remember all that took place during the illness of his children. He listened in silence, never making any comment, and when I finished thanked me and turned the conversation.

CHAPTER VIII.

At last the morning dawned of Emma's wedding-day. It was as bright as she could have wished it—a day of wintry splendor. It made us all light-hearted, for we put faith in the old adage, "Blessed is the bride on whom the sun shines." About ten o'clock I was called home by a message from Henry, whom I found in great anxiety on account of a despatch relating to his brother. Decatur was very ill, and Henry had been sent for by the president of the college.

"I cannot go," he said: "I have a case I cannot leave. Will you go?"

"Of course. I will start to-day."

"As it is now nearly ten, you will have to hurry: the train leaves at two. I will come back to take you to the station: I will be here at one o'clock, as I have something particular to tell you; so do get rid of all your young friends by that time."

His communication was what I had long dreaded: he was about to propose to Laura Charlton.

"But," he said, "I should like to have your approbation before taking the final step."

"Then, Henry, I cannot give what you want."

"Why do you dislike her so much?"

I evaded the question. "You certainly cannot believe," I replied, "that I have any but unselfish motives in opposing this match. You are, it is true, more to me than any one else, and I have never sought an alliance for you. At the same time, I have no wish that you should remain single: indeed, I believe you would be happier well married. But there is only one kind of a woman that can be to you a wife and companion: such a woman Laura is

not. Besides, you know nothing of the family or their connections. Promise me at least to await my return."

"And then, if you cannot bring forward any weighty objections, will you give your consent and endeavor to like her?"

"I will not be unreasonable, but in all things sincere."

I started on my journey with a heavy heart. Home looked gloomy: there was but one ray to my fancied troubles: that was the hope of gaining Decatur's love. I feared Henry's marriage was about to separate us.

Decatur was much younger than his brother. As he had been away from home most of his life, I had never had an opportunity of winning his affections. He was a little child when I married, but had shown such an aversion to me as his step-mother that I had persuaded his father to allow him to remain with an aunt who had taken care of him after his mother's death. From her house he went to school, and thence to college, sometimes, though rarely, coming home during vacation. I had always been anxious to give him the opportunity of knowing me better, and I had looked forward to his return after graduating with mingled feelings of hope and doubt.

I reached the college in R—— the second night, to find him unconscious and in great danger. He had taken a heavy cold during the holidays, while out hunting. Boy-like, he was heedless, and a severe fever had set in. He had good medical attendance, and I was forced to be patient. I never left him except when compelled by fatigue, but it was many days before he recognized me. At length one morning he looked up brightly, and said, "I'm glad you came: I'll never forget it."

When he became convalescent we went some twenty miles into the pine country, and remained three weeks. He regained his strength rapidly, grew gentle and sociable with me, and when we parted I felt that the intercourse of the last six weeks would not be fruitless, of happy results. When I said "Good-

bye" he kissed me voluntarily for the first time, and remarked, "I shall look forward to going home next summer with real pleasure."

I returned home about the middle of March, on a rainy, gloomy day. Henry met me a few stations below our little city, looking pale and haggard. He said he had had a great deal of work during the last court session, which was just over.

In the afternoon I had my usual visitors, notwithstanding the rain continued. Emma looked happy and joyous, and gave me a long account of her wedding and of several parties her friends had given her. At last, about dark, they were all gone, and I had an opportunity to notice how fatigued Henry really appeared, and to ask the cause.

"Mother," he began, "the young ladies have given you descriptions of our old friend's wedding—of the dressing, gayety and show, all of which were fine and in good taste; but it has been left to me to finish the account of that night, and break to you some bad news. Your valued physician, Dr. Cartwright, is no more: he was found murdered in his bed at four o'clock the following morning."

"That is terrible news, but give me some particulars."

"Some one came for him at that hour to attend a patient: it was fortunately a gentleman, who, after ringing the night-bell and not being answered, knocked at the door until he attracted the attention of a watchman, who came up and said he could wake the servant. 'Be quick, if you please,' said the gentleman: 'my child is very ill.' The man went round the house, and very soon the servant opened the hall door on his way up stairs. Two minutes later a terrific shriek was heard, and the gentleman and watchman ran up the steps, reaching the doctor's room about the same time. There stood the servant horror-struck, holding up the bed-curtains and exposing to view the poor old man, ghastly and quite stiff.

"The alarm was given and the house searched, but no trace could be discovered. No knife had been used, nor pistol: some one's strong fingers had clutched the throat and caused suffocation. Many believe it was the doctor's own hands."

"The position of the hands must have settled that point."

"The watchman's evidence was that the hands were doubled up on the chest: the servant, however, thinks that he himself pulled them down from about the face in the first moment of surprise, when he found his master did not answer his call. From the most careful examination no suspicions have been aroused that the parties discovering the murder were in any way implicated.

"The authorities offered a liberal reward for the guilty, and I was employed to examine the evidence against any one that should be suspected. In this work I have been assisted by a Mr. Cardman, an old friend of Dr. Cartwright's, who solicited the trust and was very efficient. I had had no previous acquaintance with him, but he proved to be both a gentleman and a man of sense.

"On returning home quite late one night, I found him waiting for me. He had had a visit from Mr. Charlton, who suggested Dr. Pennant as the probable perpetrator of the crime. I inquired on what Mr. Charlton grounded his suspicions. 'On some conversation, he says, which his daughter overheard. But unless there are other witnesses we need not trouble ourselves about Dr. Pennant. I have been personally acquainted with the Charltons for many years, and know the ladies are useless as legal witnesses.' 'Why?' He told me their secret: it was like a deathblow to me. I shuddered and sank into a chair: I saw in a moment the explanation of their before unaccountable want of feeling. I felt it was a barrier between Laura and myself stronger than iron. It is only at moments like these that we can measure the strength of our feelings, and I was surprised to find how deeply mine had been enlisted. I understood

now your instinctive dislike of her, and was thankful I had given you my promise not to propose until after your return. I have withdrawn from the list of her admirers, and am supposed to have been dismissed. A common greeting is, 'What! let Will Maury cut you out? I'm surprised!'"

"Has Will really engaged himself to her?"

"Yes."

"Could you not have prevented it by telling him this?"

"No: he would listen to nothing—says nothing but her own act can induce him to give her up. But I have another piece of news to relate. Mr. Cardman stands in nearly the same relation to the Charltons as we: his only brother is engaged to Miss Fannie. He hates the thoughts of it, but can do nothing. That was the reason he was so cautious in regard to Dr. Pennant, for fear of their secret becoming known here."

"How did you convince yourselves of Dr. Pennant's innocence?"

"We called on him (of course we were obliged to be very circumspect, for fear our intentions should be discovered). He seemed at first disconcerted by our visit. When we told him that unless he could give an account of every hour of that night he might get into trouble, he complied willingly. It was as good as a farce to hear him, but as you can imagine his foolish gestures and idiotic looks while relating the particulars, I will pass them over. His loquacity is truly wonderful, and, could it be guided by common sense, would make him interesting. He gave a clear history of the night, with good references: he satisfied us both at the time, and if he is playing the knave he certainly acts his part well."

"You feel assured he is innocent?"

"I do; but why do you ask so earnestly, mother? Did anything that passed during those children's illness recur to your mind?"

"Oh no: I was not aware I had spoken very earnestly: indeed, I know nothing."

CHAPTER IX.

"**GOOD - MORNING,** Miss Katherine. Do not let me interrupt you. I have come down this cold morning to enjoy a chat with you. I have been so accustomed to gossip over the affairs of our circle with you that it has seemed odd not to do so."

"I am glad to see you, Emma, but acknowledge I have made no effort to keep up our intimacy, for when a woman marries, such things generally end."

"Why?"

"Her husband is her true confidant, and he is jealous of any one who takes his place."

"My case is an exception: Mr. Pennington knows how much you have guided and advised me, and is perfectly willing you should continue to do so. But curiosity has had a share in bringing me here: do tell me if Laura is engaged to Will Maury?"

"I suppose so. Will told me so, and I called on her formally as my future cousin."

"Laura came to see me last evening, and, as Mr. Pennington was out of town, and Louise had not come, according to promise, to be with me last night, I persuaded her to remain. I led her on to speak of her approaching marriage, and finally told her how much I had been surprised when I heard of her choice. 'I surprised myself,' she answered: 'I like two others better.' 'You do?' I said: 'who?' 'Henry Stone and Edgar Rushton.' I hinted that I thought they had both been at her disposal. 'Yes,' she replied, as indifferently as possible, 'but to take Mr. Stone was to take Mrs. Stone too, and I hate her. As for Edgar, he is poor, and I have no admiration for love in a cottage.' 'As to that, Laura, Will is not rich.' 'No, but he is lucky: then mother likes him, and says she will give me immediate possession of my property, which she wouldn't do if I married Edgar.' Now, tell me, Mrs. Stone, did you ever hear of such a girl?"

"Never," I answered; "and I am afraid she will get herself into trouble,

marrying with such views. Why does she hate me?"

"She wouldn't say, and I don't believe she knows herself. I can't tell you half the nonsense she told me, and I would not tell any one else, for endless mischief might come from it. She said Mr. Stone called her his 'stately camellia' and his 'enchanted rose.' Edgar calls her the 'star of destiny,' but to Will she is 'Beauty.'"

"And I suppose he is the Beast? Poor Will! I fear he is to be rudely awakened from his dream of bliss. She ought to marry a man not very sensitive, but upright and commanding, who could keep her in check and exact respect. She will wind Will around her finger, for he adores her, and if she were to say black was white, he'd say so too."

"I declare I'm sorry. Will is such a jovial, light-hearted fellow, I would like to see him do well."

"Yes, Emma, he is merry-making and fun-loving, but merry-making is not the only business of life: he never thinks seriously two minutes at a time: you could not reason with him on any subject. Such dispositions need to meet with a disaster to balance their exuberance of spirits. Such a ballast, I believe, he will find in Laura. I only hope it may not prove too much for him."

Henry and myself spent the evening alone together, forming some plans for the future. He told me he should make arrangements to go to Europe with his brother some time during the following summer.

"To stay the eighteen months he expects to be absent?" I asked.

"Yes, if I go. There is one drawback: what shall I do with Irene? She graduates a year from next June: then she must have a home."

"That is very easily settled. If you are married, she will go to your house: if you are not, she will come here to me, when I must have the pleasure of taking her into society."

"No arrangement could be more

pleasant, and I thank you for proposing it. Do you know I have an idea of making a match for her with Decatur? Then she will be one of us, and I need never marry, having always her here to pet."

"Nonsense! Let them both alone, and never mention such a thing to either."

"Yes—best to let such things take their own way."

"People are kind enough to say I influence you and keep you single."

"I am sorry you ever think twice of such idle remarks. What the wiseacres say never affects me; but, mother, don't you think I got over that last affair of mine very quickly? By the way: I meant to have told you a piece of news. Edgar Rushton was in my office to-day, and asked me if I was at Mrs. Charlton's last night. 'No,' I said: 'why?' 'I went there,' he answered, 'to see Miss Laura, but she refused to see me. Miss Fannie, I know, was in the parlor, but as I came out I am sure I saw two persons on the gallery. One was tall, so I thought it must be you.' 'More probably it was Will Maury, as she is engaged to him.' Edgar laughed: 'So she is to me, and I don't fear him, but I do you.' 'You are mistaken, sir: I have no claims on the lady.' He looked astonished, so I added, 'She is engaged, positively, to my cousin: indeed, will be married in Easter-week; so, my dear fellow, if you fancy her, you had better remove before it is too late.' 'I will not,' he exclaimed, vehemently. 'She has given me every reason to believe I was preferred, and I'll fight before she shall jilt me.' 'Who will you fight? Certainly not the lady, and who else can you blame? Will surely had the same right to contend for the prize which you acknowledge you strove for, and hinted that I did. The least said about such things the better.' 'Don't you mind being jilted?' 'I deny having been.' 'You are not going to say you are engaged to her now?' 'No, and never have been. I would not say so much to any one else, but as your sincere friend, believing you are deeply

interested, I desire to save you further distress. I advise you never to see Laura Charlton again.' 'Be my friend, Mr. Stone, and let me tell you how I stand?' 'Certainly, and anything I can do I will.' 'I first proposed to her the night of our masquerade. This was her answer: "I will not trifl with you, bat my hand and heart must be free a while longer, for I am determined to have that proud Henry Stone at my feet." Her great partiality for you soon made me jealous: several times I remonstrated, when her usual answer was—"You are in my confidence: be patient;" and whether I was patient or not, I got no other answer, while she avoided having interviews with me. When you were out of town, and Mr. Maury was driving her out so frequently, I went there one night. She was playing for some friends to dance: I leaned over the piano and asked her to come out on the gallery. She refused. I accused her of flirting with me, while Will was really her favorite. I can't repeat all she said, but she allayed my fears: she hinted she was tired of you, and that as for Will, he was not a person to create jealousy in any one. I left her in perfect faith that her promise to me would be kept; only there was a lingering dread of you.'"

"Why, Henry," I interrupted, "it was strange Edgar Rushton should come to you!"

"Yes, but when he began, I don't think he intended to be so confidential: he was led on by his feelings, and though his communication was not flattering to me, yet I felt sorry for his distress."

"At what conclusion did he arrive?"

"Never to go to the house again, except by invitation, but to attend the wedding by way of showing his indifference."

"She is a great young lady!"

"About the smartest I ever met: she can flirt to perfection. I used to wonder how she could keep straight with so many admirers, but at that time I didn't believe she would tell downright untruths. It seems she does. I must

say, I never knew her to tell one, but then I never went so far as to ask her if she had a heart."

CHAPTER X.

EASTER passed away with all its glorious fulfilled promises. But soon our exalted thoughts were drawn earthward, and Laura's wedding-day dawned amidst the showers of April.

At breakfast Will came to us and asked Henry's advice and mine on some points of etiquette and dress. He was nervous, in great haste to get away, and we did not attempt to detain him.

In the afternoon I went over to Mrs. Charlton's. The confusion in every part of the house beggars description. Mrs. Charlton could not see why *she* should be put out of the way, even if there was to be a wedding. Laura was taking it more coolly, surrounded by the contents of two wardrobes (in addition to her new finery) heaped promiscuously on bed, chairs and tables, presenting a most incongruous mass.

After various delays, and with some trouble, we finally got down stairs, and the ceremony, according to the rites of the Church of England, commenced. I looked at Henry and Edgar, who were standing together very near the bride, as the minister said, "If any man can show just cause why these may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak," etc.

Edgar turned pale and bit his lips, while his eyes, like Henry's, never moved from Laura's face; but she was perfectly composed, and looked straight into the face of the clergyman. Neither the solemn charge, nor the steady gaze of the two men at her side (she had glanced up once and knew they were there), nor even Will's nervousness, which was apparent to every one in the room, had the effect of bringing even a blush to her cheek; while around me I heard whispered in admiring tones, "How beautiful!" "What wonderful self-possession!" For my

own part, I turned with disgust from so heartless, so selfish a woman, and did not recover my equanimity until the ceremony was over.

Then Will was himself again, the gayest of the gay—laughing with and bantering all around him. It had come to be understood that he had achieved a victory in obtaining the hand of Miss Charlton, and for once he was a hero.

When I went up to congratulate Laura, I found her rallying Henry (who sat beside her on the sofa) for having kissed her before Will; and I thought it very impertinent of him to tell her he had taken what was his by right.

"It might have been," was her cool reply.

Edgar left the room soon after the ceremony, and was gone some time, but returned and congratulated Will and Laura very gracefully. Afterward I heard him say to Laura, "Do you know, Miss Laura, I came here with the intention of stopping the ceremony?"

"Indeed!"

"Yes: what would you have done?"

"I never expected anything else than that you would prevent the completion of the rites."

Here a roar of laughter overwhelmed him, and he turned away in confusion. I felt sure that such an interruption would not have displeased her, and I was not quite certain she would have had the ceremony continued. Henry, however, would not listen to such suspicions. He had a full conviction that Laura was now in earnest. His comment on her when we reached home that night was—"She is a noble woman, but only a trifle too much of a politician."

As for myself, I gave up all idea of ever being able to comprehend my new cousin. During the two weeks she remained at home after the marriage she was devoted to Will, would neither receive nor return visits, could not bear him to be out of her sight; and it may be easily imagined how delighted he was, for her cold manners before-hand had more than once, he now acknowledged, made him doubt whether she loved him as he did her. It was

this that had caused his agitation; for I now learned that Will could think seriously when he chose, and had not gone through with the ceremony in as careless a frame of mind as steadier people sometimes betray.

But here ends my part of this story. It is no fiction; the characters and events are real; and I have but recalled them from the storehouse of memory, leaving the conclusion to be given by another pen.



PART II.

CHAPTER I.

ON a bright day in October Mrs. Stone received a letter from Mr. Henry Stone, then absent in Europe. After reading it, she turned to Irene Williams and said, "Your guardian will be here in one week: he returns home three months sooner than he had expected."

"Will his brother come also?"

"Certainly: he says business brings him back, and that Decatur chooses to return with him."

Irene had been with Mrs. Stone since June. They had found in each other all the one could wish for in a mother, the other in a daughter.

Though it had developed during this interval, Irene's form was still slight, making her appear taller than she really was. Her features were not very regular, but a pensive expression, which suited well her large dark eyes, the pearly whiteness of her skin and her soft brown hair, invested her appearance with no ordinary charm, which was heightened by the natural grace of her movements and her sweet but somewhat shy demeanor. She had indeed become a "star" in the circle into which she had been introduced as "Mr. Stone's ward."

For the last few weeks she had had a schoolmate staying with her, Ellen Chester by name, a bright, black-eyed gypsy—rather pretty, very gay, and a general favorite. Previously to her visit, Irene had gone but little into general society. Mrs. Stone had kept her with herself as much as possible, seeking at once to study and to fortify a character which the world, it was to be feared, would do its best to spoil.

Irene sat, after Mrs. Stone had left the room, lost in thought, until aroused by the entrance of Ellen Chester. She imparted the news just mentioned, on

which Ellen exclaimed, "How jolly!—a beau apiece in the house! Won't we have grand times, Irene?"

Now this, it may be remembered, was a sore subject with Irene, and she answered indignantly, notwithstanding she had learnt something in regard to such matters during the last year, "A beau, indeed! Why, Mr. Henry is old and grave: he'll soon teach you not to think of him in that light."

"And his brother?"

"I have never seen him, but he is much younger, I know."

The household was set in order, and all looked forward to the day destined to bring back the absent ones. The three ladies were in the parlor when the carriage drove to the door. Mrs. Stone hastened to the front gallery to meet and welcome the brothers, while Irene passed through another door and ran up stairs.

Henry, who was extravagantly fond of his stepmother, did not hurry from her side to seek even Irene, but Decatur, ever impetuous, darted into the parlor, where he was startled at finding a lady with black eyes and long black curls. He knew at a glance this could not be his brother's ward, for that brother had often described her to him as soft-eyed and so fair as to deserve the name of "Lily." His embarrassment, however, did not last long, as Mrs. Stone soon entered and introduced Miss Chester.

Meanwhile, Henry had caught a glimpse of Irene running up stairs, and, without saying a word, had hastened after her. Several doors were open, and he looked hurriedly into every room, but did not find her. Passing out to the side gallery, he saw her standing in a corner which was quite enclosed with vines. She glanced timidly up, but, seeing he was alone, came

forward holding out both her hands. He took them in his, and looked intently at her: then, gathering her in his arms, pressed her to his heart, exclaiming, "My sweet Irene! my little daughter! I have seen nothing so fair as you."

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Henry," she replied in her usual soft tone, while a smile of rare sweetness beamed from her eyes.

"Are you happy here, Irene? Tell me—do not be afraid."

"Yes, yes! I have everything to make me so." She was interrupted by a strange voice, exclaiming, "Oh, I have found you at last! It was selfish in you, Henry, to take her away: you knew I was dying to see what she looks like. Come," continued the speaker, taking her hand, "I don't want any introduction, but I am going to have a kiss: I claim it as a brother." He kissed her affectionately as she stood at Henry's side, encircled by Henry's arm.

The trio returned to the parlor, where Henry was presented to Miss Chester, and some hours passed in the recital of events at home and the description of scenes and incidents of travel. When the others retired, Henry stayed to talk with Mrs. Stone on more private subjects.

His first inquiries related to Irene, and he listened with evident delight and pride to the warm terms in which his stepmother, whose keen and candid judgment he so highly estimated, spoke of his charge, dwelling particularly on the truthfulness of her nature and the strong affection veiled beneath her sensitiveness and reserve.

"And now, Henry," Mrs. Stone concluded, "tell me what has become of Will Maury?"

"He is in Paris, mother, but I can hardly bear to tell you where his wife is."

"I am prepared to hear anything of her. I never expected the match to result in any good."

"She is in an insane asylum in the south of France."

"Is it possible?"

"Yes, and the physicians assert that she has been mad for years."

"And Will?"

"Crushed! I was surprised when I found he had so much real feeling. I don't believe I ever appreciated him as he deserved."

"Is it public? did any scandal occur?"

"No; but I'll tell you the whole story. When they first went to Europe they fixed themselves in Paris. There I met them. I saw at once that Laura was acting just as she had done here. Feeling assured such reckless conduct could have but one end in such a place as Paris, I hastened my departure, and when in Germany wrote to Will, imploring him to take his wife away from Paris. Somewhat to my surprise, he did not resent this interference, but left very soon with his wife for the south of France, where they took up their abode in a retired village."

"During the autumn he wrote, begging me to come and see him; and I went. He was in great distress. I need not give you the particulars of Laura's folly: it is enough to say that her conduct had made Will, who truly loved her, very miserable. He had reasoned, or tried to reason, with her, but she listened with her old air of cold indifference, shrugged her pretty shoulders and went her own way. I hinted then at the possibility of her being insane, but he would not hear of it. During my visit she at first persistently avoided me, but one day, while Will was absent on business and I was sitting in the parlor alone, Laura, who I thought had gone out, came in elegantly dressed and began to upbraid me. Oh, mother, I hate to tell you what passed! She declared that she loved me, and that it was *you* who had come between us, but that she would have her revenge. 'What revenge do you want, Laura?' I asked, feeling certain she was insane, and thinking it best to humor her. 'Her death!' 'Why, Laura, you cannot commit murder?' 'I can't, but father can: he did for me before, and will again. Listen!' She came close to me and whispered, 'He killed Dr. Cartwright because I willed it.'"

"Good Heavens, Henry!" exclaimed

Mrs. Stone : "do you think that can be so?"

"Hear me out. Mother, you can't imagine how beautiful she looked, her eyes flashing and her exquisitely moulded arms and neck bare, gleaming cold and white; but her ravings were so horrible that I sat shocked and stunned. I soon, however, detected that when I humored her she grew more calm; and when Will came in her old manner suddenly returned, and her ease and composure were such that I could scarcely credit my senses. Will noticed my preoccupied looks, and inquired the cause. I gave him an evasive answer, and as she did not evince the least interest in the subject, he remained unsuspicious.

"Next morning he told me Laura had tormented him the whole night about going home. 'Don't you go, Will,' I said. 'Why?' 'Ask her why she wants to go?' He did so, but she was too wily to be caught.

"I saw now that if anything could be done for her, it must be done at once, but I dreaded to broach the matter to Will. She sometimes raved before the servants, but only in English, so that they had no suspicion of her state. The crisis occurred one day when they had had company at dinner. After the guests had left, Will began bantering me about a very pretty woman who had been of the party. Suddenly, Laura broke out in one of her terrible spells. I felt the moment had come; so, while Will looked on speechless, I encouraged her to talk—to tell about Dr. Cartwright and about you. Strange to say, she did not bring in me, except to curse me. I was not sorry, for I pitied Will, and was glad he was spared the scene of a few days before, when she had sworn on her knees that she loved me better than life. She declared I had instigated the murder, and that I had told her to make Will take her home to murder you. The end of the scene was, that Will sank senseless on the floor, and this brought her to herself: she kissed him and wept over him as only a woman who loves can. If she ever has really lucid moments, in those moments there

is no doubt she loves her husband. We called in medical advice, and there was no difficulty in getting a certificate of insanity."

"Poor Will!" exclaimed Mrs. Stone. "What a terrible fate!"

"Yes, and no hopes of release. He went, at first, very often to see her, but it did her no good, and him as little. When she found she could not persuade him to take her home, she grew furious. She does not appear to suffer, and is seldom dangerous, though very destructive. She will take a handkerchief, for instance, and pick it to pieces, thread by thread: her watch was found in a drawer not only taken apart, but with every little wheel and chain divided into the minutest parts, and that so carefully and neatly as to show that the employment must have occupied days."

"Have you an idea that she really knows anything of Dr. Cartwright's murder?"

"Oh yes, without doubt she does. The physician says that the destruction of small things shows the form her madness had taken, and that she had probably instigated or planned the deed. I am going to pursue the matter cautiously, and see whether a case against Mr. Charlton can be made out. Her evidence, of course, cannot be taken, and her physician thinks she has never told the name of the one who is most implicated. Until the fall court is over, I shall have no time to attend to the matter: at present I must content myself with closely observing Mr. Charlton's conduct."

"Has Will Maury written to Laura's family that she is in an asylum?"

"No. They seldom wrote to her, and do not seem at all interested in her whereabouts. If they mention her to me, I shall only say I saw them in the south of France. Good-night."

CHAPTER II.

THE autumn passed pleasantly away. The two young ladies and Decatur went out a great deal to parties and concerts

and spent their mornings in riding or boating. It is needless to recount the admiration excited by the two pretty girls, so very opposite in appearance, while Henry watched closely to see if Decatur showed any preference for Irene.

One cloudy afternoon toward the end of November he met them all three in a maple grove on the outskirts of the town, and stopped to inquire where they were going.

"To the river," said Irene.

"I think we shall have rain, perhaps sleet, before night."

"I don't," answered Decatur. "We are to have our boating race this evening, and I have been watching the weather all day."

Irene looked uncertain, but Decatur and Ellen seeming confident, she merely asked, "Where are you going, Mr. Henry?"

"To visit a gentleman living about five miles beyond the ferry. You had all better put off your boating frolic for another day."

So saying, he gathered up his reins and drove on. The others stood still a few moments, discussing the question he had started. Impatient of the delay, Decatur exclaimed, "Oh, come on: we can start, and if it clouds up we can come back: who cares for a ducking?"

"I say come on too," said Ellen. "We are neither sugar nor salt, nor anybody's honey."

And on they accordingly went.

The point for which they were bound was nearly a mile from the town, but could be reached, by a little path through the woods, somewhat sooner than otherwise. It was a quiet, secluded place, and here Decatur had a row-boat. He and the young ladies had often rowed together, but lately he had introduced a novel amusement. He had had three canoes made, each too small to hold more than one person, and having taught Irene and Ellen how to paddle, had challenged them to a race. They had gone out once before for this purpose, but the girls were not in sufficient practice to compete with him in any de-

gree. Since then they had improved very much, and were anxious to display their proficiency.

For more than three miles below their starting-point the river flowed gently and evenly, with a very winding course, but then began some natural obstructions to navigation, greatly augmented by driftwood; so that at a certain clump of trees (which formed a miniature island) the main current turned abruptly to the right, and became very rapid and dangerous. On the other side of this island the water was shallow, and the channel, if such it could be called, impassable from logs and undergrowth so closely matted together as to give the island the appearance of a point of land extending out from the shore. Below this the stream again spread itself out, flowing freely for several miles.

Our party reached the river, and, giving no further thought to the weather, launched their canoes. After various delays the race began, in which all were so absorbed as not to observe the increasing darkness, until a flash of lightning, followed by a loud peal of thunder, awoke them to the fact that a storm was about to burst upon them. Hastily turning their tiny craft, they began pulling up stream with the wind against them and the water rippling around them.

"Pull fast, girls! It is getting dark, and the rain will soon be upon us."

"I am so tired!" said Irene. "Don't go so fast: I can scarcely see you."

"Don't give up: paddle hard and keep talking, so that we may know we are together."

It would have been easy for Decatur to get back before the rain began to fall. But the girls soon grew fatigued with their unaccustomed exertions, and Irene, who complained of feeling cold, fell gradually behind the others. Suddenly she called out, "Oh help me, Decatur! I've lost my paddle."

Her companions heard this exclamation with horror. It was already quite dark, the rain falling slowly, mixed with sleet, and they were still nearly a mile from the landing-place. Some time

was taken up in useless questions and expressions of regret and dismay, Irene bitterly deplored her awkwardness and the trouble she was giving.

Decatur at last essayed to go back and seek for the paddle, but in the confusion all three got separated. Ellen's loud screams soon guided Decatur back to her, but their joint efforts to find Irene were unavailing: they called her name, but no answer came.

"What shall we do, Ellen?" asked Decatur. It was the first time he had ever thus addressed her.

"I don't know. Poor Irene! how frightened she must be! Irene! Irene!"

At length Decatur said, despondingly, "We can do her no good here, Ellen: let us go ashore and return to town for help."

They did what they should have done at first—made for the shore at the nearest point. Leaving the canoes to float at random, they started on a half run toward the town. The rain and sleet were falling fast, but fortunately there was very little wind. When they came to Mrs. Stone's, Ellen went in, while Decatur continued his course, and soon collected a number of people to go in search of the lost girl.

The news spread fast in all directions. "If she has gone to the 'obstructions,'" observed one of those who were commenting on it, "she is drowned: no chance for her in that current." "It may be," remarked another, "that the canoe has drifted ashore at one of the sharp turns of the crooked river. Anyway, she'll be frozen if she is out much longer in this weather."

Meanwhile a party of young men had followed Decatur back to the river with lanterns. He had got out his large boat, which in a few seconds was filled with a crew whose powerful strokes sent it rapidly down the river, while his other companions walked along the bank, searching carefully.

Soon after the news had been spread through the town, Henry Stone, having hurried through his visit, reached the ferry on his way home. The ferry was a long distance below the point known

as the "obstructions." The "flat" happened to be on the town side of the river, and while waiting for it he observed a man, commonly known by his Christian name of Jasper, talking earnestly with the ferryman. As they neared him he heard the ferryman exclaim, "She's drowned: what could have saved her?"

As Jasper jumped ashore, Henry caught him by the arm, demanding what had happened.

"Oh, Mr. Stone, is it you?" asked the man.

"Yes. Tell me instantly what has happened."

"I know nothin', but they tells me to come to the ferry and see if a little canoe had floated down."

"Was Miss Irene Williams said to have been in the canoe?"

The question was too imperatively put to admit of any evasion, and Jasper, more loth than his "bettters" sometimes are to communicate painful news, stammered out a reluctant "Yes."

By close questioning, Mr. Stone learned the particulars of the accident, and it did not take him long to decide upon his course.

He got the ferryman's skiff and a lantern, and began rowing up the river, while Jasper drove the buggy up the bank on the town side. Henry kept near the right bank, meeting the current: as he neared the "obstructions" his progress became more and more impeded by darkness and the increased swiftness of the stream.

He kept a good lookout, and was sure no canoe had passed him floating in the strong current, and his hopes began to rise, but he shuddered at every sound.

When he reached the "obstructions" he was in doubt how to proceed. It would be useless to attempt going round the point, for the eddy was too strong to be stemmed by a man rowing up stream; so, running his boat into the shallow water, he urged it forward until it stuck fast, and then abandoned it to continue his search on foot.

He crossed in the mud and weeds to

the other side, where it was drier and firmer, from logs and timber having accumulated here during successive years. Raising the lantern, he looked to the right and to the left, but the darkness prevented his seeing ten steps ahead. An impulse which he did not strive to resist decided him to return toward the right bank, and he had gone but a short distance when a canoe, lying on one side, met his sight. It was drawn up between two logs, in a position which convinced him that it had not come there by accident. He had never seen these little boats of his brother's, but he felt no doubt that this was one of them—the one of which he was in search.

"Where was Irene?" He shivered as he asked himself this question. If she had remained in the boat, she must by this time be frozen—dead! He did not call her or go farther, but stood for some moments rooted to the spot. Suddenly, as a thought occurred to him, he sprang forward, and leaning across the boat threw the lantern's rays into the hollow nook beyond. He had guessed right: the space was occupied by a form lying, or rather crouching, to shelter itself from the storm.

He placed the lantern on the ground, and jumping over the canoe, knelt down beside the unconscious girl and clasped her to his heart. But a shuddering cry burst from him as he felt how cold and lifeless her form lay in his arms. Her clothes, of a texture ill suited to such weather, were wet through and beginning to congeal. He pulled off his own half-drenched cloak, and having wrapped it around her, began to rub her hands. A gleam of hope shot across his mind as he remembered a flask of brandy which had been given him that evening as something very choice. He drew it from his coat-pocket and poured some of the liquor over her head. He was afraid to put it to her lips; but as the minutes passed, which in that awful suspense seemed hours, and she gave no signs of reviving, he at last saturated his handkerchief and pressed it to her half-parted lips. She shivered, choked, and, after struggling

a few moments, opened her eyes. There was no expression of surprise in them—rather a look of expectation gratified. "Oh, Mr. Henry," she said in her usual soft and quiet tone, "I knew *you* would come. I was sure you wouldn't leave me here to perish."

If ever her voice had sounded like music in his ear, it was then. But he was too excited, too anxious, to reply. He set himself to think how he could get her home.

"Irene," he said at last, "if I leave you a moment, you won't be afraid?"

"No—only not for long, I am in such terrible pain."

He wrapped his cloak closer around her, and having placed her in the most sheltered position, started in search of Jasper, who was happily within hail, and who brought the buggy down to the bank. Some time was consumed in ascertaining the depth of the intervening water. The rain continued to fall, the wind was rising, and the darkness was almost impenetrable. Jasper waded in, lantern in hand, and expressed his belief that the stream was fordable. Then Henry raised Irene in his arms and bore her to the shore. She moaned several times, and was half insensible by the time he got her into the buggy and started for home, while Jasper continued his course up the river on foot, to meet the exploring party and make the announcement that Miss Williams was safe. A loud cheer greeted the news, and soon collected the scattered members of the party.

"Quite right!" remarked one of them: "Mr. Stone was the proper person to find her."

"How very romantic!" drawled out another. "I should not be surprised if there had been an understanding between guardian and ward that she should get lost and he know where to find her."

"That's real ill-natured, Lawrence: she's too young for such freaks."

They continued to joke until Decatur, who had stayed behind to secure his boat, joined the group, and noticing their high spirits, said, "Don't laugh: it is

nothing to joke about. My brother will not easily forgive me. I can't believe all is as well as Jasper reports. Let us return to town."

"All right! and when you have been home and convinced yourself that the fair one takes it as coolly as we do, come up to the club-room and join us in some egg-nogg, which will soon make you forget the ducking you have sustained in the cause of chivalry. Say, Decatur, didn't it wash all the love out of your heart?"

He made no reply, but hastened toward home, where Henry had arrived before him.

Mrs. Stone and Ellen had gone out to the side gate when they heard the buggy, to meet, as they supposed, Henry returning from his visit—each dreading to tell of the accident, but both feeling that he must be informed at once. With a mixed feeling of relief and dread they saw him get out and lift Irene from the vehicle. She lay in his arms as if dead, and Ellen, supposing her to be so, gave vent to a loud scream. He carried his burden into the house, and seeing a large fire in the dining-room, went in there and laid her on the rug before the glowing grate. He called for various restoratives, and kept rubbing her hands, looking all the while so grave and stern that Ellen's fright took a new turn.

"I wonder," she thought, "what he will say to Decatur? I wish I had stayed at home. Oh, if we had only come back after we met him! What will he do?"

Mrs. Stone, who had regained her self-possession, and was aiding her stepson, said at last, "Nothing will do her any good while she has on these wet clothes. Henry, fetch her across the hall into my room, and Ellen and I will get her into bed while you go for the doctor."

He obeyed, and soon returned with a physician, to whom he gave a hurried account of what had happened, ending with inquiring what was to be feared.

"Either congestion of the lungs or inflammatory rheumatism."

By midnight it was decided to be the

latter. Her sufferings were intense. Henry was sitting by the bedside when Decatur came in pale and excited. The two brothers were on opposite sides of the bed, but neither looked at the other. Mrs. Stone noticed it, and spoke kindly to the younger one. Irene too looked up at him, and when he bent over her to say "Forgive," she replied, "Do not blame yourself: we were all in the wrong."

Decatur returned to the parlor, where Ellen Chester was.

"Didn't I tell you he wouldn't speak to you?" she exclaimed. "Indeed, he has scarcely spoken to a soul since he came home."

"He has a right to be angry," replied poor Decatur: "he never approved of our boating frolics. The other day he told me some mischief would come of them."

"Why didn't he say that to Irene?" Ellen felt tempted to ask, but she refrained, and only said, "Poor Irene! Do you think she suffers *very* much? Her face is dreadfully pale."

"Yes, and what I fear is, that she will never get over it. Oh, Ellen, why didn't we come back when warned?"

After some further talk, Ellen left the room, saying she had always been afraid of Mr. Stone, and now she dreaded to go where he was. She lingered in the hall until Henry came out, and then went and stayed with her friend till morning.

Decatur felt, as was natural, more remorse than Ellen, but it was not from this cause alone that he shrank from encountering his brother. His temper was hot and impetuous, and, though he could acknowledge to himself that Henry had "a right to be angry," he yet knew that a very few words of reproach would be liable to drive him to some harsh recrimination.

Henry, on the other hand, had refrained from speaking until his excitement had subsided. He now walked up to his brother, and, holding out his hand, said, "Decatur, what has been done cannot be recalled, and regrets and reproaches are alike useless."

The answer was short, but manly and

unaffected: "I am sincerely sorry." After a silence, Decatur said, "I was afraid you would never forgive me."

"I am sorry you should have thought so hardly of me; but," he added, "I have no hopes of her recovery."

"Oh, don't say that, my brother! Do not say I am a murderer!"

"Calm yourself, Decatur. It is best to be prepared for the worst. I have come to say this to you, and to add—for it will be very hard for me to give her up—that if in a moment of grief I lose self-control and reproach you, remember that I have assured you, in calm moments, that I entertain no feeling toward you but affection."

She did not die, but the days grew to weeks, the weeks to months, before she knew any cessation of pain. Dr. White visited her night and day, doing all that medical knowledge could suggest to allay her agony.

Her patience was admirable: no murmur ever escaped her lips—only a low, continuous moaning whenever the fever rose and added its burning torture to the ceaseless pain.

CHAPTER III.

ELLEN CHESTER remained with her friend until the middle of January, and was untiring in her assiduous devotion. On the evening of the day she left, Henry was speaking of her to his ward, praising her kindness, and remarked she must have had a dull time while with them.

"Yes: it was too bad I should be sick, for Ellen loves me so much she would seldom go out and leave me."

"It was more than unfortunate, but you have been the greater sufferer."

"Bodily, yes; but I do not care so for going out as she does. Did you like her, Mr. Henry?"

He was a little puzzled at the question, but answered, "Yes; yet after that boating frolic I felt very hard toward her. I was ashamed to think as I did; so, when I found you liked to have her

near you, I wrote to her mother, begging she might remain longer."

"She used to say she was terribly afraid of you."

"Did she? I was not aware that any one was afraid of me."

"I don't see why they should be: I'm sure I never was."

"I am glad to hear that: fear is the last feeling I should wish to inspire."

Irene turned her head from him, murmuring, "Oh, I do wish I could go to sleep once more free from pain!"

"I hope you will now, before very long. You are improving: you have had no fever for three days."

"My hands have hurt me very much, and I can't help fearing they will get bent. It is vain to think about it, I know, but I cannot help it."

"It is very natural," was all he could say as he took the pretty hands held out to him, and rubbed them gently for a long time.

Neither her hands nor any of her limbs became bent: remedies had been too promptly applied with a skillful hand, and she recovered entirely from the attack.

The weary winter was at last gone, and spring nearly over, when Irene once more moved about the house, looking almost like the ghost of her former self, the roundness gone from her limbs and the color from her cheeks. The dark hair had grown very much, making her features more pale by the contrast, and deepening the pensive expression of her countenance.

One morning, when breakfast was over, Mrs. Stone reminded the young gentlemen of a dinner-party to come off that day.

"I had not forgotten it," said Henry, "but it is impossible for me to go: it will be five o'clock before I can leave the court-house, and that is the dinner-hour, with ten miles to ride to reach the house."

"Then it is out of the question to expect you. Irene, suppose I were to go: do you think you could get along by yourself for one day?"

"Yes indeed, Mrs. Stone! Please do not remain on my account. I have an interesting book, and shall not mind being alone at all."

Henry glanced at her with a somewhat keen look, and urged his stepmother to go. Mrs. Stone and Decatur accordingly went to the party, and Irene, after eating an early dinner, remained in the dining-room reading until the middle of the afternoon: she then went out on the side gallery. The weather was lovely: the plants and flowers in the garden seemed inviting her to come and be with them. "Come into the garden, Maud," she quoted with a sigh. "But no: I will be wiser than Maud—I'll stay out of the garden." Then, as she resumed her book, she murmured, with a half smile, "There's nobody waiting among the roses for me."

An hour before sundown Henry returned home, and immediately came to her. "Give me the book," he said, taking a seat by her side: "I'll read to you." He read in a clear voice until the shadows grew long and the air cool, when he closed the book and took her hand: "Come into the parlor, Irene: I am afraid you may take cold out here." He led her in, and placing her on the sofa, sat down beside her. The room was already partially dark—only the outlines of objects could be seen.

Irene proposed opening a window or lighting the lamp.

"There is light enough to talk by," he replied, "and I want you to tell me how you got lost: I have never fully understood it."

Whether this was but an opening to another topic of conversation was a question she did not ask herself. She proceeded simply to give him the information he had asked her: "While we were looking for my paddle we got separated: it was so dark we could not see each other at any distance. My boat, of course, kept floating down, and I heard Ellen screaming and begging Decatur to come back. He answered her, and passed close by me, rowing up, and continued to answer Ellen's calls, while his voice grew fainter to me; and

I was too excited to call until I suppose there was a considerable distance between us. I heard them when they called me, and knew that they were uneasy, which added to my terror; but I was so cold I could not answer loud enough to be heard.

"Then all grew quiet and I no longer heard their voices. How terribly I felt! I knew then it was of no use to scream—that there was no one to help me. Soon I felt that the boat moved faster—that the current was stronger. I sat up: before this I had been leaning down, hiding my face like a coward, and uttering a prayer half aloud. Decatur had often described the river to Ellen and me, and it came into my mind that my only chance lay in preventing the canoe from going to the right of the little island. I saw nothing until a willow limb struck the bow: it hung from the island banks. I caught it with both hands and pulled backward. I could just see the limbs and weeds around me, but I kept pulling and jerking at everything I could grasp, until I found the boat was still: then, by holding on to the little trees, I pushed it to the left. The next thing I knew it was free again, floating slowly, and in a few moments it struck the logs at the 'obstructions.'

"With the rope in my hand I jumped ashore, or rather into the darkness, for I had very little idea of where I was. I drew the canoe after me, for I did not like to have it lost. Then, as the sleet was falling, pelting me, I thought of turning it down for a shelter, for, being so small and light, I could manage it very well. Decatur had taught us a good deal about boats."

"You were very brave and very thoughtful." Henry pressed the little hands between his. "Irene, do you remember what you said when you revived?"

"Something about you," she replied frankly, "for I remember thinking only about you."

He passed his arm around her and drew her closer to his side: "Tell me, Irene, if you meant *all* your sweet voice implied that night?"

"It is said that in dire extremities we say only what we feel."

These words, low spoken, thrilled his heart as none had ever done before. He pressed her hand to his lips, murmuring, "My worshiped idol! my beautiful flower! will you indeed be my 'heart's-ease,' sweet Irene?"

She did not answer, but suffered him to press on her lips the first kiss he had ever dared to imprint there.

"Never before," he said, "because I had not the right as a lover, and I could never kiss you innocently as your guardian. I have loved you long, dearest, but tried to hide it, and fear now I shall not have the approval of any one."

"Who is there to object?"

"Oh, you don't know how the world will judge me. I shall be accused of having taken advantage of my position and relationship: you will be thought too young and inexperienced. The relationship, to be sure, is nothing: your mother was my uncle's stepdaughter. She was a little older than myself, and married young. I was fifteen when she sent for me to be your sponsor: it pleased me, of course, as it might have done any other boy, and I took the vows, making all the promises she exacted without hesitation, but I did not see you again for ten years. Then she sent for me, when on her deathbed, and begged me to remember my promises. I had always loved her very much, and I heeded the directions she gave about you; all of which, I think I may say, have been fully carried out. That winter mother and I came to see you I felt, when I left you, that you were more to me than my cousin's daughter, and for that reason I went to Europe before you came home. I encouraged your going out, that you might meet others, and, if it were to be, love some one else. At last, that night decided me: I need not tell you what I suffered while rowing up the river—how I started at every sound, and feared to touch you when at last I discovered you. It revealed how much you were to me, and your words and conduct made me hope I was not indifferent to you. In all

those terrible nights that followed I would go, when I could, to your side and rub your hands, lingering and hoping some accident, some word, would betray you; but I was disappointed. I only discovered that my presence did not displease you. Oh, my sweet girl! you have kept your heart well locked; but I do not complain: it is too great a treasure to be guarded carelessly."

Irene listened, too happy to speak except in reply to direct questions.

"Irene, did you need the terrors of that night to learn your heart?"

"Yes."

"But you said then you knew I would come."

"When I thought I should die from cold before any one got to me, I tried to pray, to say I was willing to die, but I could not: I could see you looking sad, and the words were unsaid. Ah! we can't even think an untruth, Mr. Henry, with death staring us in the face."

"Go on, dearest—tell me."

"Then I grew so cold, and I wished for you: I cried too. At last I became sleepy, and dreamt you came, calling me pet names, and that I was very happy."

"Enough, Irene! It makes you nervous now to recall that night; and no wonder. Yes, I came, thank Heaven! and, if you say I may, I will remain to love and serve you all my life, my fair 'queen of hearts.'"

He waited a few minutes for a reply, but she made none, and he said again, "Tell me I may, dear Irene."

"If I say you may, who shall say nay? I think I am the one most interested."

It grew dark in the room. The house was wrapped in silence: no sound could be heard but the murmur of their low voices as they repeated to one another those words which have lost none of their old beauty and sweetness, though they have rolled down through the discord of six thousand years—"I love you."

They were finally aroused by the house-servant coming through the hall

to close the front door, and talking to himself: "I wonder where Miss Irene be? She hasn't rung for lights, and I don't know if I must have supper or not."

"Have supper," called out Henry: "bring it in and ring the bell: then we will come."

"Don't you want a light in the parlor, sir?"

"Not till after tea."

"Let me go," whispered Irene, "and attend to the table."

"No, I will not," he replied, playfully. "Who cares what there is to eat?"

When the bell rang he led her in by the hand, and entertained her gayly during the meal, for fear the newness of their position would make her uncomfortable in the presence of the servants.

After tea they returned to the parlor, now brightly lighted: he read, while she leaned back in a large chair and listened. When they heard the carriage coming he got up and bent over her chair, for he noticed her change color: "I'll tell mother to-night. I did not mean to frighten you when I said no one will approve of my course. Be brave and queenly."

He hastened out and met the returned party.

"Had a splendid time, Henry!" exclaimed his brother. "Everybody was wishing for you, though: they did not seem to consider that I filled your place at all."

After they had reached the parlor and talked a while, Mrs. Stone went toward her bed-room. Henry followed her.

"Mother," he began, "I want to see you a moment."

"Come in: I am going to lay off my bonnet and wrappings. But why didn't you send Irene to bed? She looks tired."

"I'll tell you, for it is of her I wish to speak;" and he related what had occurred. Mrs. Stone listened in silence as she stood before her glass arranging her dress.

"Is it wise?" she asked as he concluded.

"I can't see that it is unwise," he replied. "Have you no congratulations?"

She took a seat on the sofa and motioned him to one beside her: then asked, gravely, "Which is your first duty —her interest or your gratification?"

"There cannot be two opinions on that subject: her interest, assuredly."

"Do you think it will be furthered by marrying you?"

"If her happiness is my happiness, my pleasure and her interest become one and the same thing."

"It is an unsuitable marriage," continued Mrs. Stone, speaking more to herself than her stepson.

"Tell me the objections."

"Too great a difference in your ages."

He remembered that there had been a greater between his father's age and hers, but he answered, gently, "She is eighteen, and I am not thirty-three."

"She is too young and inexperienced."

"I am willing to wait, if you think it advisable. Do you?"

"I am no advocate for long engagements."

He was silent.

"Henry, she is very pretty, and might have made a brilliant match."

"Very true. A marriage with me will not be brilliant. I can give her only a comfortable home and devotion."

"I can't think that she loves you disinterestedly."

"Why, mother, she is too honest and pure-hearted to dissemble."

"Yes, but does she know her own feelings?"

"I think so."

Mrs. Stone did not like it, and very soon said so candidly. She left him, going to the dining-room for some tea, and he laid his head on the window-sill with the moonlight streaming over him. He was miserable. He had expected outsiders to censure him, but not his own family. His stepmother and he had been companions and confidential friends, and he knew that she had none but good motives in opposing him. Then he thought of the vow he had made to Irene's mother to protect and care for her. He asked himself the question again and again, "Am I sacrificing her?" and he wondered if it was only

his love that assured him he was not. He could not acknowledge it to be so : his was a steady devotion that had grown slowly and taken deep root. Yet now, as he was obliged to confess to himself, he was intoxicated with the thought of having realized the sweetest dream Hope had ever painted for him.

During this time, Irene and Decatur had remained in the parlor. The latter soon noticed the prolonged absence of the other two, and asked where they had gone. Irene blushed crimson : she could not but know what detained them so long.

"You know!" he exclaimed, quickly.
"What's to pay now?"

It was impossible for Irene to equivocate, so she replied, "I know, but cannot tell."

"Can't? or won't?"

"Both."

"I can guess ; so you had better make a virtue of necessity, and tell me, for you will thereby make a friend, and it's my opinion you will need one."

She looked up frightened : "Oh, Decatur, would *you* be my friend if I were to be your sister?"

"That I would!" he exclaimed, embracing and kissing her. "I knew Henry was after you, he was always in such a fever of anxiety about you; but if he don't catch it to-night from the old lady, I'm mistaken."

Irene shivered and covered her face with her hands : "Does she not like me, Decatur? I love her very much, and I am very grateful for her kindness."

"Don't know, but a storm is coming : that confab has lasted too long : it don't take many words to tell of happiness. But stop crying : I'll stand by you and fight well for you, if only to show that I didn't mean to run off and leave you to perish last winter."

"I never thought you did : I never felt hardly toward you."

"Hush! don't talk about that : I can't bear it. Kiss me again, and promise to come to me when you want a friend. I could scream, I'm so glad you love Henry. I *will* say, Hurrah!"

He went off to get his supper, which he was still boy enough to enjoy, whatever might be going on. Irene thought she would retire, for it was long past her usual time for doing so. She knew this would not be putting off her interview with Mrs. Stone, for she had slept in that lady's room from the time she had first been ill.

The dining-room door was closed, and she saw no one until she was in the chamber, when she discovered Henry. Her first inclination was to glide quickly out, but, on observing his bowed head and his whole attitude, expressive of perplexity and grief, her instinct told her that her place was at his side. Laying both hands on his head, she said, pleadingly, "What is it, darling?" He did not reply, but the dear little hands were drawn down from his head, and he passed them caressingly over his face. "Won't you tell me, Mr. Henry?" Still he did not answer, and she drew herself up, half playfully, half imperiously, and said, "You have called me your queen, and by the right you have thus given me I *demand* to know what has happened. You have no right to torture me with suspense."

She seemed indeed queenly in her pure girlish dignity, and he looked up at her with pride : "Irene, would you be willing to wait a few years?"

"If you think it best, yes. I am your ward, to be guided by you *until* we are married." There was a tone of archness in this last speech, which was something new in Irene.

"I am thinking of resigning the guardianship."

"To whom?"

"To Mrs. Stone."

She turned her head away and tried to withdraw her hands, but he held them firmly : "Don't leave me, Irene : I am troubled. God knows I meant to do right by you. Will you obey me if I ask a hard thing of you?"

"Have I ever disobeyed you?"

"Never! Now listen. You shall not be bound by any promise to me : you are free to go and to act as you please, while I pledge my honor to you to be

and remain your plighted lover, never acknowledging my allegiance canceled except by your command."

"I do not understand it," she answered, doubtfully: "what is your object?"

"To satisfy mother that I have not taken advantage of my position, and that your love is not gratitude."

"And you are going to give me up to her?"

"I haven't brought myself to say 'I will,' yet."

"Then please do not;" and she fell on her knees beside him.

He sprang up and raised her in his arms: "You shall never have to ask me twice for anything. Give you up? No, I swear I will not, 'queen of hearts.'"

Mrs. Stone at that moment entered the room. "Henry," she said, "it would have been advisable to leave this conversation until to-morrow: you have excited her far too much already. Come, my dear, you must retire."

"Let me tell you," said he, "what has been agreed on?"

"Nothing to-night. To-morrow you will both be calmer and better able to talk. Come, Irene," she continued, kindly, taking her from Mr. Stone, who had kept his arm around her. "You certainly are not afraid I shall be unkind to you."

As Henry left the room he saw his stepmother kiss her affectionately.

"I will assist you to undress, Irene; then read to you if you wish, but not a thing shall you tell me until to-morrow."

It was late the next afternoon when Mr. Stone returned from his office. He met Mrs. Stone in the hall, and asked where Irene was.

"In my room. There is company in the parlor."

That did not stop him. He went to Irene, sent the maid out of the room and closed the door. "What has made you so nervous, Irene?" he asked as he drew a chair close to the couch. "You are pale and half crying."

"Mrs. Stone and I have had a long talk. She was very kind, never blamed me, but said that under the peculiar circumstances it was her duty to ascertain positively if my happiness was dependent on this marriage."

"What did she ask of you?"

"She wants us to consent to an entire separation until the autumn, and says she will take me to the Virginia Springs, where I can see more of society. But I do not want to go: I have no taste for society. If we are contented, why should she be so exacting?"

"She is perfectly conscientious, and wishes to do the best for us both. I know it is hard, dearest," and he pressed his lips on hers to conceal his own emotion, "but you will go if I ask you to? I had intended, in any case, that you should travel this summer for your health; only I thought to have been sometimes with you. 'Queen of hearts,' you are not afraid to trust me?"

Tears prevented her answering, but he felt that she had full confidence in him, and he thanked her a thousand times in words of sweetest eloquence.

CHAPTER IV.

DURING the winter, Henry Stone had not allowed himself to become so entirely absorbed by anxiety for his ward, or so occupied by his ordinary affairs, as to forego his purpose of investigating, and, if possible, unraveling, the mystery connected with the death of Dr. Cartwright. He was urged to this attempt by two powerful motives—the desire to clear the memory of an old friend of the imputation of suicide, and the wish to gain some additional knowledge of the character and history of a woman whose fascinations he had felt, and whose fate, as he remembered with a shudder, might, but for an accidental revelation, have been linked with his own.

Mr. Cardman, to whom he owed that revelation, aided him in his present inquiries, which were prosecuted without result in many directions, and were at last narrowed down to a series of interrogations addressed to the only persons who lay open to suspicion—Mr. Charlton and Dr. Pennant.

The manner and conduct of the former were such as speedily to convince his examiners not only of his innocence, but of his inability to throw any light upon the matter. He replied with readiness and with evident frankness to all the questions that were put to him, admitted that he had heard his daughter express a strong and unaccountable dislike to Dr. Cartwright, but neither gave any answers betraying a complicity in the crime, nor disclosed any facts which could afford the slightest clew to the perpetrator.

Dr. Pennant proved a more difficult subject to manage, and his demeanor and replies were much less satisfactory. At first he endeavored to turn the inquiry aside by a long and rambling dissertation on the responsibilities of medi-

cal men in general and his own in particular, his scrupulous attention to his duties and the unjust reflections which had been cast upon him. In subsequent interviews he had recourse to a bolder line of action, defied his accusers to prove anything against him, and seemed disposed to rest upon this and the declaration of his own innocence. But his natural loquacity made it comparatively easy to extract from him some damaging admissions, ending at last in the avowal that he had bound himself by an oath to conceal a secret of which he averred that he had become the unwilling possessor, but which no persuasions or threats should induce him to betray.

This resolution it was found impossible to shake, and he maintained it up to the time of his death, which occurred many years after Will Maury and his unhappy wife had been laid in untimely graves, and when he himself, despite his oddities, had long secured the reputation of a skillful physician and an honest man. Among his papers was found a package marked "Private," and directed to Mr. Henry Stone, to whom it was accordingly transmitted by the doctor's executors. When opened it was found to contain a letter and a number of poems. The latter were all sonnets addressed "To Laura," and revealed the unsuspected fact that the insignificant little man, as he was then considered, had been as completely enslaved by the fascinations of Laura Charlton as any of her recognized admirers. Too shrewd or too sensitive to make any open exhibition of a passion which he knew to be hopeless, he had sought consolation in sundry poetical outpourings, making the somewhat unsympathizing Muses his only confidantes. But though he "never told his love," he could not prevent the object of it from being conscious of a power

over him, and thus obtaining many little favors which she might have hesitated to accept from a less unpresuming admirer.

On the evening of Emma Raiman's wedding she pretended to have been seized with a sudden faintness, and asked Dr. Pennant to go out with her to a gallery. She there, after some hesitation, informed him that she needed his assistance, but had first a terrible secret to impart to him, which he must take a solemn oath never to reveal. "How," continued the letter, "could I resist her pleadings when it was only with an effort that I could restrain myself from falling at her feet and worshiping her matchless beauty? I took the oath she administered—a more horrible one never fell from mortal lips. Before she had finished it I knew her secret even better than she did herself."

She then told him that she was subject to attacks of insanity, for which Dr. Cartwright was privately treating her. One of these spells was coming on her that night, and she wanted him to aid her in leaving Mrs. Raiman's house unobserved, and to go with her to Dr. Cartwright's. They set out about midnight, Laura having previously procured a large cloak to throw over her elegant maid-of-honor's dress.

On reaching the house, Laura produced a key and opened the door without knocking. Her escort waited at the door about fifteen minutes, at the end of which she came out, very composed, and walked silently back by his side. Half an hour later she was again among the dancers.

When told the news next morning, she exhibited no very great surprise, receiving it in her usual heartless manner. For a long time Dr. Pennant did not suspect her, though aware of the suspicion which would be excited in others if her visit at so unusual an hour should become known. He hinted this to her on one occasion, but she merely shrugged her shoulders and said she never troubled herself about what "might be," and she was sorry, as he was her

friend, that he was so cowardly as to be alarmed by imaginary dangers.

Once only did he recur to the subject. When she was on the point of starting for Europe he asked her what had become of the key with which she had opened the door of Dr. Cartwright's house. To his astonishment, she denied having used a key, asserting that Dr. Pennant himself had opened the door for her. The calm assurance with which this falsehood was uttered struck him dumb. On reflection, he was driven to the conclusion that she had committed the crime herself, and that she was prepared, if suspicion were ever awakened, to accuse him as an accomplice, or even as the sole perpetrator of the act. Perhaps she had even induced him to accompany her with this very object, knowing that his quarrel with Dr. Cartwright would be brought forward in confirmation of the charge. At all events, she had taken a most effectual mode of securing his silence so long as either of them could be endangered by a disclosure.

CHAPTER V.

HAVING made their preparations, Mrs. Stone and Irene started on their summer trip, going to several fashionable watering-places, and seeing a good deal of society and gay life. Irene's health improved rapidly, and she was soon able to participate in the pleasures which are so keenly relished in youth, and which had for her the additional charm of novelty. She was much admired, and Mrs. Stone, in accordance with her plan, did nothing to discourage the attentions of the gentlemen.

Decatur joined them occasionally, and by his high spirits contributed much to their enjoyment. When, however, he discovered that the lovers did not correspond, he was very indignant, declaring that it was a wretched piece of business, and that if he were Henry he wouldn't stand it. On his return home he gave his brother a tantalizing account of Irene's beaux, winding up with,

"If you lose her you'll deserve it. I'd like to know why you haven't as much right to contend for her hand as all those soaplock college boys and fortune-hunters who are for ever dangling around her?"

"If she loves me she will be true through every temptation: if not, the sooner I know it the better."

"I wish you would just say, 'Do it,' and I'd bring her back to you if there were fifty stepmothers guarding her, and all as good talkers as Mrs. Stone."

"Decatur, you must learn to be more respectful in speaking of Mrs. Stone."

"Let me alone: I will have my say out sometimes."

On his next visit to the ladies he was disgusted at the reserve which prevented Irene from asking any questions about his brother. As she made no inquiries, he would tell her nothing, and did not know how often she murmured to herself, "He might have sent me a message by Decatur."

So the summer passed away, and toward the end of September, Henry received a letter from his stepmother containing the following passage:

"The time has come when we must refer to your engagement. You have faithfully kept your promise this summer, and it is right that you should know the result of our experiment. As I had anticipated, Irene takes real pleasure in society, and, like all young girls, likes to be admired. She has had a great deal of attention paid her, and has now two suitors. What do you say to my accepting for her an invitation to spend some time in New York City, where she will be in the best society?"

Henry Stone must have abjured the character of a lover altogether if he could have calmly consented to what was proposed. He, however, loved Irene with all the intensity of manhood, and he was not many minutes in deciding upon his course. He left home by the next train, and to Mrs. Stone's surprise appeared before her on the day on which she was expecting a reply to

her letter. He had arrived during the afternoon, and asked to see her in the parlor, without giving his name.

After a little talk, he said he considered he had a right to see Irene without further delay: he had been faithful to his promise, and if she were going to discard him, he had sworn to receive his dismissal from no one but herself, not even through a letter: he was determined there should be no deception or delusion on either side.

"Do you think you had better see her this evening? She is going to attend the masked ball in the parlors here tonight, and it might unnerve her."

"Allow me to choose how we shall meet. You say there is to be a masquerade: well, do not tell her I have arrived, and I will meet her *en masque*, and make myself known or not as I find advisable. Where is she now?"

"Gone to ride."

"What character does she take?"

"Zelica, from *Lalla Rookh*: I chose it. You will not know her, she is so much improved: she is growing stout."

"Glad to hear it! If I can, I will get a dress for some character in the same poem."

A few hours later the parlors of the —— Hotel presented a gorgeous sight, and music as entrancing as that of Mokanna's palace delighted the senses. As a crowd of personages of every clime and race streamed in, a close observer might have noticed an Azim watching each new-comer, but seemingly taking no more interest in what was going on around him than did the young Persian warrior when wandering through "the vast illuminated halls" of the Veiled Prophet. Then he went out, walked down the gallery and took a seat on the broad sill of a bow window, the curtains of which were drawn behind him. No one had spoken to him: all seemed instinctively to know that he was a stranger. Presently he heard two voices beyond the curtains talking earnestly, and one he soon recognized as Irene's.

"You must, at least, admit," he heard her say, "that I never encouraged you.

The first night we met, when I was given to you as your 'fate' in the silly game of Forfeits we were playing, I warned you that I was heartless, and a week afterward assured you that it was not a mere jest."

Henry did not catch the reply, and for some moments the conversation went on in a low tone. What he next heard was in a man's voice: "It is as I said last night: I have a rival."

"You have no right to make that assertion. Leave me!"

Again the reply was lost, and after some low murmuring, silence ensued. Henry drew aside the curtain and looked in. On a luxurious chair reclined a veiled figure, so covered with folds of tulle and satin that he would have failed to recognize it but for an attitude unstudied but full of grace which in moments of languor was characteristic of Irene. Through the transparent gauze her arms and shoulders gleamed white and round, as he had never seen them before. Her face was, of course, concealed by her mask, but he could imagine the pensive expression which had always been its principal charm.

"Zelica!"

She started up: "Who calls?"

"Azim—Zelica's Azim."

She turned toward the window, and seeing a figure, said, "Oh go away: I want to be alone."

"People do not go to balls to be alone: you must submit to having your solitude intruded upon, lady."

He stepped boldly inside: "Take my arm, lady, and let us walk through the rooms. I have not done so yet, nor have you; for with whom should Zelica walk when Azim is here?"

"Who are you? I cannot go: I'm waiting here for some one—for the sultan of Turkey."

"Never mind any one else," he said, drawing her hand through his arm. "Who has a right before Azim?"

Many remarks were made as they passed along.

"Who is this daring Azim that has possession of Miss Williams?"

"I wish I were Mokanna," replied a

tall priest. "I think it would do me good to knock over that intruder."

"It would not be in keeping with your saintly character," said the first speaker, "to contend for the hand of an infidel. Leave that to the sultan of Turkey."

"It is unfortunate you should be so well known," whispered Azim.

"I have been betrayed: the dress-maker sold my secret."

"Provoking!"

"I knew it before I came down, but my chaperon would not let me change my character."

"I ought to be much obliged to her, since my own costume has given me a claim to your notice."

"Who are you?" she asked, and looked up suddenly. "It is strange you should single me out in this crowd, for everybody seems curious to know who *you* are?"

"How is it strange that Azim should seek out his Zelica?"

"I am not *your* Zelica."

"Suppose I say you are?"

She laughed, and murmured softly, as if to herself, "My Azim is not here."

His heart thrilled, and he felt tempted to tear off his mask and claim her before the assembled crowd.

Just then the sultan of Turkey came up to claim her for a promised dance. Henry resigned her, not quite unwillingly, for he had need to master his emotions, and strolling back he soon left the ball-rooms and sought a cooler atmosphere.

An hour or two later Mrs. Stone passed Irene in the hall and whispered, "Come with me: you are getting fatigued."

They took a roundabout way to their apartment, where a faint light was burning. Mrs. Stone seated herself near a window, saying, "You had better go into your dressing-room and unmask: there is a bright light there. I will sit here, where it is cool."

Irene stood before the mirror with the mask in her hand, and said half aloud, "I should make but a poor

actress: neither this dress nor the mask has enabled me to disguise myself."

A moment afterward she started back in affright as the form of Azim rose behind her own in the glass.

"Queen of hearts, do you not know me?"

She was too startled to reply, and Henry, throwing off his mask, folded his arms around her.

"Tell me," he said, "is this meeting as rapturous as that of the poet's Azim and Zelica?"

"Yes."

"But I trust, Irene, not fraught with their subsequent sorrows?"

"God grant it!" and her full heart found relief in passionate tears.

When she was a little more composed he said, "To-night, for the last time, I shall exercise the right of a guardian. You have never told me an untruth. Look me in the face and tell me if there is any one whom you prefer to me?"

"No one!" and she extended her hand.

He pressed her to his heart and covered her face with kisses.

Neither Irene nor Mrs. Stone returned to the ball-room that night. Decatur circulated the news that his brother had arrived unexpectedly, and that they were all going home on the next day.

As they were separating for the night, Henry asked Decatur what he now thought of Irene.

"She is too good for anybody," was the reply.

"Do not flatter me," she said, blushing at the undisguised homage paid her by both brothers.

"I am not given to flattering, and I will leave it to Mrs. Stone to decide."

"Not so: I am aware I have not received justice from you lately."

"Oh, mother," exclaimed Henry, apologetically, "it is only Decatur's rash way of speaking, and he did not understand all the circumstances."

"It is time he had some confidence in my love for his father's children. Come back, Decatur: let us talk it over."

He took the seat on the sofa just vacated by Irene, saying, "I have no doubt you love Henry."

"And do you think I should have shown my love by allowing him to enter into a rash engagement which might have tarnished his honor or embittered his subsequent peace? Now listen: I had not a doubt of your brother: I knew he could stand any test. But Irene was young, full of gratitude for his unparalleled kindness; and as her health last winter secluded her entirely from society, she had had no opportunity of comparing him with others. Therefore I did not believe she could make an unbiased choice. As she had no one else to act the part of a disinterested friend and adviser, I felt it incumbent on me, as well on her account as on Henry's, to assume the position. Time and absence are the tests of our feelings: they sweep away illusions and excitement, but strengthen faith and real affection. Such were my motives. Was I not right? Was I not at least just?"

"Oh, I am a boor! But I was jealous for Henry."

"No, you are not a boor, and your love for your brother is very commendable. In future I hope we shall be on better terms, for when Henry is married you and I shall have to depend more and more on each other."

Decatur was touched as well as convinced, and replied with feeling, "It shall not be my fault if we fail to be friends."

CHAPTER VI.

THEIR acquaintances gathered round them next morning and deplored their departure. One bright New York belle asked Henry why he had come to carry off Irene, adding that they had hoped to take her with them to New York.

He laughed: "I suspect if I tell the truth you will excuse me. I am going to be married, and wish, of course, my family to be present at the wedding."

"That being the case, we must of

course not complain. But I didn't fancy you were an engaged man."

"Why not?"

"You seem too much at ease with the present company: were I your betrothed, I should not permit any wandering thoughts."

"Mine are fixed."

"Well, mine have wandered from the purpose we had in view. Cannot Miss Williams join us a little later in New York? Being her guardian, you are, I suppose, the proper person of whom to ask the favor?"

"I am going to New York on my bridal-trip, and will take her with me. When we are there, if you can persuade her to remain, she has my permission to do so."

"Oh that is delightful! Thank you! Of course we can persuade her to remain. Mr. Dalton, don't despair: we shall have Miss Williams with us this winter. I have fulfilled my promise to get her to Gotham: it is for you gentlemen to redeem your pledge to induce her to remain as one of us."

"Take care," said Decatur with a laugh, "that my brother does not entrap you all. You have not asked him what inducements he will offer in opposition to your persuasions."

Irene blushed, and confusion seemed nearly to have overtaken both her and Henry, when the latter, recovering his self-possession, replied, "I shall only offer her a flying trip to Europe: my affairs will not permit me to remain there more than a few weeks."

"A trip to Europe is a dazzling offer," replied the young lady, "but she can go even there, and still spend some time with us. We are willing to wait a little for her."

"Between you all," said Mrs. Stone, "you will turn Irene's head; so I shall interpose. It is quite time we were saying 'Good-bye.'"

Three weeks afterward the members of the same party received cards to call

on Mr. and Mrs. Henry Stone at the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

"Strange," remarked the young lady before mentioned, as the carriages drove up to the private entrance, "that there was no mention of Miss Williams! I am more interested in her than in twenty brides."

It is needless to speak of the exclamations that arose when, after being ushered into a private parlor, they saw Mr. Stone lead in Irene dressed in white silk. He tried to introduce her with becoming gravity, but he was overwhelmed with reproaches: "We are indeed entrapped, as your brother warned us we should be. No one at the Springs suspected you of being engaged."

"Will you not admit that I have kept my promise to bring her to Gotham?"

"No: this is only a subterfuge no one shall applaud."

"Try your persuasions to induce her to stay."

"We are not pledged to do so: it was your ward, not your wife, whom we undertook to win; so all that now remains is to offer our congratulations, and wish you *bon voyage* and a happy return."

The voyage and return were both accomplished in safety, and the newly-married couple settled down quietly at C—— in the fulfillment of ordinary duties and the enjoyment of a happiness as substantial and lasting as the mutual affection on which it was based. In a character like Irene's, love does not burn with a scorching fire nor shine with a fitful or illusive flame. It sinks with a still but penetrating power into the whole being; not absorbing the energies, but absorbed by them—not checking or changing the development, but blending and harmonizing with it. Such natures are not transformed by love, but they are matured and enriched by it. The purity and strength are their own: the glow and the perfume are Love's.



HATHAWAY STRANGE;

OR,

THE SECOND OF JANUARY.

L

CHAPTER I. HATH AND MATER.

THEY said he had the right name, the girls of St. L——, but still they did not cease wondering at the coincidence of name and nature. The conclusion was easily arrived at that he might be a lineal descendant of Ann Hathaway, otherwise the unfortunate Mrs. Shakespeare; but the *Strange* part—where did he get *that*? Was it inherited, picked up or imported to suit the oddity who bore it?

And how did Hathaway Strange's name come to fit him so exactly? To an ordinary observer there was nothing strange in the physical man. He carried his head on his broad shoulders like common bipeds. He had two eyes only, and though they were, it must be admitted, generally half closed, he managed to see many things in a very clear light. He possessed the usual number of hands and fingers, and actually walked on his feet instead of his head. We must dig farther for the solution of our query, "Why was he Strange?"

Let us state a few commonplace facts in the history of this provoking puzzle, for such he was to the womankind of St. L——. Nor will we go farther back than his first appearance in the aforementioned city. At that time he was introduced to public notice as a genteel-enough-looking person, of a very decided business-despatch kind of manner, and was rarely seen beyond the range of the brown-stone front of the substantial banking-house of Drewry & Co. If, in those first years, he parleyed at street corners with his fellows, or nodded recognition to anything in the shape of woman, it never came to the knowledge of mortal.

In a crowd he was never seen, if we except the congregation of Rev. Mr. Breck. There, indeed, you might count to a certainty on meeting him, at precisely 10.30 A. M. on the first day of every week from January to December. Those who sat immediately behind him surmised that the poor fellow might be the victim of a painful Sunday crick of the neck, as he had never yet been seen

to turn his head from the right angle of Pew No. 27, let the attractions be ever so overwhelming, right or left, fore or aft. The service over, he threaded his way through the large or small congregation, the unobserved of all observers; for who is going to be for ever bowing to and looking after a deaf and dumb man? Are you not out of all patience with the fellow?

Let us leave him alone, "wrapped in the solitude of his own originality."

On the highest ground in the most beautiful street of the city stood a crazy, blackened building known as the "Jackson Corner." Perambulators on this fashionable promenade all said the same thing of the unsightly nuisance—"What a pity some of our long-pursed capitalists do not invest an idle twenty thousand in the improvement of this handsome spot!"

There it stood, year after year, the wretched cumberer of the lovely grounds. But it has numbered its last decade. The weather-stained veteran of fifty winter storms has gone down, vanished before the magic wand of internal improvement. Busy workmen ply their cheerful, noisy craft through the long spring and summer days succeeding, and on the ruins of the past uprises a model of architectural beauty and elegance. Carpenter and mason give place to plasterer and fresco painter; these, in turn, make way for the upholsterer and paper-hanger; while landscape gardener and conservatory florist give the finishing stroke of external embellishment.

To the oft-repeated query, "Who is to be the occupant of this palatial home?" no one seemed prepared to give a positive answer, and no two surmises agreed. But on the very first morning on which profound stillness had reigned since the initial stroke of demolition the wheels of an elegant phaeton rolled up the graveled carriage-way and stopped before the silent portal.

Hathaway Strange stepped slowly from the vehicle, as deliberately ascended the marble steps, adjusted a key

to the lock of the carved oaken door and pushed it gently open. Then returning to the carriage, he seemed carefully to lift a large black bundle from the back seat, and with the utmost solicitude assisted it to stand upright on the gravelly walk.

"Strange-looking young wife, that!" muttered Mrs. Seall, just over the way, as she stood behind the drawn curtains at her window, showing only her black peepers. "Fine cages don't always catch fine birds. It looks much more like his grandmother!"

The black silk bundle disappeared slowly from Mrs. Seall's eager gaze down the wide hall, and was most carefully deposited in a small but cozy chamber opening into a larger one. In each of these rooms a grate threw a rosy coal-glow on comfortable surroundings. In the smaller chamber stood, as if in waiting, the great cushioned, armed rocker, capable of being converted by simple machinery into an invalid couch. Into this repose-inviter our venerable bundle was tenderly ensconced. Even the small feet, muffled in woolen overalls, were assigned their places on the yielding footstool. The only effort the bundle essayed was a fumbling attempt to untie its hood-strings.

"Don't worry, Mater. That's my business," said the attendant; and the hood and numerous outside wrappings were removed.

By this time the contents of the rocker had begun to assume something of the contour of a female form.

A pair of soft gray eyes came into view from beneath the pure white crape cap border, but ere their expression could be caught they closed, and the head gently rested on the back of the chair, while the thin hands, by a slight movement, interlocked the fingers over the lap.

"Are you so very much fatigued, dear Mater? What can I do for you? Which of these do you take now?" said the anxious Hathaway, opening the traveling-bag he still carried on his arm, and rattling the contents—vials, silver cup

and spoon. His tall form stooped, and the trembling hands of his charge now rested on his hair.

"Oh, Hathey, God is so good to your poor old Mater! She could not trust Him to bring her to this moment, so faithless was she all the while; and yet he has done it, and you are at my knees again, my little Hathey—just the same! God bless and reward you, my boy!"

And he *was* the boy again—ay, even to tears.

"Now, Mater," said he, "promise me that you will not speak or move until you have slept a little or feel rested. I must run down to the dépôt for a very little while, to look after our baggage. Hetty will sit quite near you while I am gone." He touched his lips to her wrinkled cheeks, and walked softly out of the room.

Ah, she could sleep now—such a sleep as she had not known in long years: anxious care was for ever lulled in the perfect repose of his love and tenderness.

Hathaway Strange's father had come to his death by violence in the full tide of earthly success. From the fearful blow his fond wife never recovered, and by a quick consumption passed away, leaving two children, a son and a daughter, at the ages of four and six.

At the time of this terrible stroke a half-sister of the elder Strange was a member of his household, and in a few weeks was to have become a bride. But the brimming cup of happiness just touching her lips was put aside. She could not see the children of such a brother as she had lost left to the care of paid domestics; nor would she consent to impose what she feared might, in time, prove a burden upon him who would gladly have borne it rather than relinquish her and the happiness she would confer. Her future was plain before her—a life-consecration of thought, time, soul and body to rearing the motherless ones. But the girl, who had inherited the mother's frail constitution, faded away in her seventeenth year, and left the stricken brother

and aunt to find in each other their stay and consolation. Having his aunt to sympathize in his young griefs and share his lighter moods, Hathaway cared to form no other attachments. No lover, after long years of separation, ever hastened more promptly to the side of his charmer than did Hathaway to his aunt's in the college vacations. Since then he had nursed one darling thought—to make her a life-home of quiet comfort. He had no other incentive to effort, no higher aim of existence. In his eyes she was the sum of all perfection; and before the pure, steady radiance of his Mater's life and character—as unspotted from the world as Alpine snows—there was no court beauty but must have paled her ineffectual fires.

With practical good sense Mater combined a highly intellectual taste, and his conversations with her at night, after the distasteful duties of the day were over, were looked forward to with eagerness. Reading, as too great an effort for her feeble eyesight, he had interdicted, but this great source of pleasure to her he himself liberally supplied.

"I won't be so selfish as to make you talk any longer to-night," he would often say. "Which of your bookshelf entertainers shall I select for your hearing—Payson, Wilberforce or Robert Hall? Or may I, as usual, fall back on *my* charmer, past, present and future, the incomparable Hannah More?"

The health of Hathaway's beloved guardian had failed very sensibly in the last year—had given him cause indeed to fear that the new home would never know her presence. But the best medical attention, his devoted care of her and the recent change had inspired fresh hope.

One mild October afternoon, about three weeks after her arrival, she made, with his assistance, a tour of inspection through the house and grounds. To inaugurate the event he had ordered fires in the front and back parlors, dining-room and sitting-room. The brilliant hall chandelier threw its gaslight on statuettes and paintings, while flower-

vases full of rare exotics, brought with his own hand from the green-house, added their generous offering to delight the senses. The large oval tea-tray glittered with delicate china and an elaborate silver service, before which he placed her after their grand round, for the proud host was making a royal banquet on the first night his guest had honored his board. He knew that her invalid regimen would ignore all but her souchong and dry toast, but even that should not prevent the display of his commissary department stores. A cup of coffee at *his* table made by *her* hands was all that passed his own lips. The sumptuous meal was borne back untasted to the kitchen by domestics attired in their best in honor of this their first introduction to the newly-installed mistress of the house.

Now the two are at home again. Mater has suffered herself to be placed in her cushioned receptacle, and Hathaway is at his post, book in hand, for the hour's reading before evening worship.

With the book as yet unopened in his hand, Hathaway said, "Well, my Mater has complimented my taste in the general arrangement of hot-house, kitchen and flower-garden, but not a word has she given me about the house."

"Oh, Hathey dear, it is all so beautiful, comfortable and nice that I could find no words to suit it; and yet—it seems too bad—" She paused, then sighed, then took up her knitting-work, but did not go on.

"Too bad," said the other, "to drag you around when you were so fatigued! Are you so very tired?"

"Oh no, no! The exercise has done me good, and gives promise of a sound night's sleep; but I was thinking, wondering, wanting to ask you, all the while, what I wished to know so much—" Another break and a longer pause.

"Why, Mater, you make me very curious to have you finish. I fear you are not perfectly satisfied: you find something omitted, something lacking, after all. Now, please do be candid and let me know what it is."

A faint smile, almost the only one that had recently lit up her calm face, played around her mouth, and was caught up in a just perceptible twinkle by the soft gray eyes.

"Ah, you have already answered your own question: you have omitted something—just one thing."

"Seems to me, Mater, you are right. There is a lack which I too felt for the first time to-night. At first, I thought it was that we kept the house too dark, and that is the reason I ordered Henry not to turn off the gas in the rooms to-night. Please remind me to-morrow to direct him to let more sunshine through the south windows. And I was thinking, too, that we are a bit too quiet here. Why, do you know I can hear my mantel-clock ticking all through the house? I reckon that is why some people have canary birds and goldfinches hanging around in their pretty cages—to make a noise, you know. Well, I will get half a dozen to-morrow, Mater: see if I don't."

By this time the listener's smile had culminated into a little chuckle resembling a bona fide laugh. She dropped her clicking needles and looked straight into his serious, inquiring face:

"Singing birds are very well in their places, but, Hathey, my boy, has it never occurred to you that in a complete house-furnishing a *wife* is always taken for granted?"

"Oh, ho, ho, ho!" said or rather roared out the astonished house-furnisher, bringing both hands down on the book he held with a terrible explosive sound, throwing his head back against the chair and lifting his widely extended eyes to the ceiling. "A *wife* is it, Mater? And where do people get that piece of furniture? Is it kept in a dry-goods establishment? And how much does it cost?"—taking his purse from his pocket. "More than canaries? And will you tell me where to hang that kind of bird of Paradise?"

The smile was now all gone from her face, and, looking very much as a judge would in pronouncing a sentence of doom, she replied with impressive slow-

ness: "They are bought with love, my son, and hung in the heart."

"Neither of which can I spare from the present occupant and possessor," said Hathaway quickly and tenderly, kissing the soft, pale brow before him. "But if my Mater tells me such a bird sings in the topmost branch of the tallest tree that waves on the loftiest pinnacle of Chimborazo's peak, I'll have it if 'twill add one note of pleasure to *her* existence."

"Mater has a bird the music of whose voice, for her ear at least, you need not try to match. It is Hathey that needs a bird now, not Mater."

"I wonder how long it takes to get a wife?" exclaimed Hathaway, pensively, settling his chin on his bosom and looking into the fire as penetratingly as when he was contracting with his builders. "How many days did it take Cousin John Drewry to cage his Annie bird?"

"People do such things now so much quicker than was the case in my day that I cannot tell you exactly; but, at any rate, so far as your case is concerned, I don't think there is any time to be lost, Hathey dear. Let me see!" she added, musingly: "this is the third week in October. Hathey, I'll give you until the second day of January next."

He rose and drew out his watch: "It is your bed-time, and past, Mater. You wake, the first time, about five: will you just pull your bell-rope, that rings the bell over my bed, at that time? Now I will call Hetty to put you away for the night."

Then the Bible chapter was read to her, the nightly blessing invoked by her, he kneeling at her side while she still sat with low-bent head, and the good-night kiss was left with her.

After he was gone she reflected upon the solemn seriousness of his countenance, and almost regretted the conversation.

CHAPTER II. HATH'S STYLE.

FIVE A. M. Not a whit too soon for Chimborazo's peak-climber. Indeed,

said climber was awake before Mater's bell tinkled.

Tinkle! tinkle! Hathaway fairly leaped from under the bed-clothes: the nearest window-sash was quite as desperately thrown up. In the gravel walk beneath a matin songster was getting his breakfast, pouncing greedily upon a worm.

"Ah, it is true," said he, "the early bird catches the worm. Wonder if the early bird can be caught so easily by the worm?"

There was also some despatch in the mysteries of his morning toilette on this occasion, and an extra glance at his wardrobe mirror as to the *tout ensemble*.

Save the usual cheerful morning greeting, "How is Mater finding herself to-day?" the breakfast hour passed mostly in silence. He paused once only during the matutinal meal and leaned back in his chair, knife and fork arrested in their office, while he gave a smiling glance at the head of the table, just to imagine how a "canary" would look up there, perched by the shining coffee-urn.

Breakfast finished, he strode rapidly through the hall, snatched his hat from the rack in passing, and with determined vim ground the unoffending gravel beneath his heel as he stepped quickly to the front gate, swung it open and walked hastily away.

Poor deserted Mater! She was sure now that the bird-talk had gone wrong. "He thinks I am discontented. I must not be so meddlesome after this."

And all during the day she lay pondering that hasty departure, and wondering what Hathey Strange's strangeness would evolve next.

As for that strange individual himself, he took an air-line course for the St. L—— and M. R. R. Dépôt, bought a ticket, and in due time was deposited at M——, one hundred miles distant. An obsequious hackman was ordered to take him to the corner of Fourth and Cherry streets. Mounting the steps of a handsome private residence, he rang the front door bell, and to the polite

colored porter who opened the door, said, "I wish to see Dr. Hanney."

"He does not live here now, sir."

"Ah, indeed! Has he disposed of this place?"

"Well, not exactly, sir, I reckon. He just kinder give it up to Mas' Reuben, after he and Miss Sue were married."

"And who is your Mas' Reuben?"

But why should he wish to know who Mas' Reuben was if he had married Miss Sue? But some very natural occurrences *will* surprise us sometimes.

He was turning to recall the hack, when the waiter said, "Won't you leave your card and call agin, sir? The doctor usually drives in durin' the afternoon."

"No; it doesn't matter."

Doesn't matter, indeed, with our strange one, that he had lain awake half the night, ransacking his brain to think up a girl he knew, and had come a hundred miles to see her! As the playmate and visitor of his lost sister he remembered Sue Hanney. In fact, he had sent her a valentine on his return from college, and that was the utmost extent of his reminiscences in that way. In the mean time, he had not been getting married himself, and had never reflected that she might have been so occupied.

Straight back to the dépôt he goes.

"When does the down-train pass?" he inquired.

"In twenty minutes, sir."

In twenty minutes Hathaway Strange was speeding homeward, and at 8 P. M. sat down at the tea-table as quietly as if he had just stepped in from the office. Indeed, Mater thought such was the case, for he had placed two large red apples by her plate, saying, as he gently touched her white forehead with his lips, "I got these for you on my way home, Mater."

Everybody is supposed to have a "familiar," and if any one stood in that relationship to Hathaway, it certainly was Ben Hall. On the day succeeding Hathaway's unsuccessful journey he

was thundering at the barred door of his friend, just at the delicious hour when Ben was wrapped in the elysium of his morning nap: "Let me in—business!"

"Business hours, then, sir." Ben had recognized the voice.

"Let me in, I say! If you don't, I'll break the door down!" and a strong shoulder pressed so sturdily against the panel that the door did seem about to give way.

"Hold on there, Hathyerway, till I can get my eyes open and reach the bolt." Unbolting the door, Ben sprang back into bed, covered himself up and pretended to be fast asleep. The fashionable caller opened the door, walked in and seated himself on the side of the bed without saying a word, while Ben snored fervently.

"Ben, what girls do you know?"

That woke Ben. "What?" said he, sitting bolt upright with a suddenness of movement that indicated a galvanic shock. "What did you say, Hath?" laying his hand on his visitor's shoulder and giving it a good shake.

"I'm going to get married by the second of January, and wish you'd dress and help me!"

"All right, my friend!" replied Ben, lifting the cover quietly and moving gently out on the other side of the bed, while keeping his eye rolled around steadfastly toward his too-contiguous bedfellow—"All right! I'll do it. But look here, Hath: while I'm dressing just take an Havana and seat yourself by the table, and run over that calculation—old Skelton's chancery suit, you know. I found it pretty tough last night, and am not sure it's right."

Ben had a double purpose in view—first, by the complexity of calculation to test his friend's sanity; and second, to keep him busy and at a safe distance if *non compos mentis*.

Hath took the seat and cigar, and verified the calculation, his lips moving between his nonchalant puffs. When through with the task, he had filled a page of letter paper with figures.

Ben, having completed his toilette,

ventured near, and on comparing the two calculations found that they tallied exactly. "Now, Hath," he exclaimed, "what about the girls?"

"Well, I am going to be Mrs. Hathaway Strange by the second of January —no, somebody else is going to be her, and I'm to carry her home and hang her up to look at—no, to sit at the head of the table. But the trouble is, I don't know any young ladies, and if I did, I'm afraid I could not tell the birds—I mean the girls—from their mothers; and you know I wouldn't like to get them mixed up. Now, as I don't know 'tother from which in women-matters, and you know all of them, I thought you could tell me all about them, introduce me and give me such help as I need. You understand?"

"Bound to get married, eh?"

"Mater has given me till the second of January to get a wife."

"And who is *Mater*?"

"Mater!" answered Hathaway, regarding Ben with a stare of dumb astonishment, and pausing for about ten seconds, as if in wonder that *anybody* should need information on that subject—"Mater—is Mater."

Ben was perfectly satisfied. He required no further information. "By the second of January, did you say, Hath?"

"Yes."

"Well, the time is rather limited."

"By no means. All we have to do is to find the girl and ask her."

"Think so?"

"So tell me where we can see some and have an opportunity to examine them."

"I've got it!" broke out the delighted Ben. "There is to be a 'hop' at the Commercial this very night, and I am one of the committee of managers, and will be at your service for the entire evening."

"And what's a hop? Something that grows on a pole, I believe. But you say *to-night*. Why, I thought we could look at two or three this morning, between ten and twelve o'clock, and see as many more this afternoon, between four and six."

"Oh no; that won't do at all," replied Ben, making a most desperate effort to look as serious as the business demanded. "They show much better by moonshine and gaslight. Just leave it all to me."

"Why do you say *show*, Ben? That ain't what I'm looking for. But I was out of town yesterday—got more on hand to-day than usual on that account—so can't stay another moment. If it suits, I'll call for you after supper and we'll go to the hop."

Thus Ben carried his point, and, to his credit be it told, did his best for his charge. He managed to get Hathaway into the elegant suite of apartments dedicated to the evening festivities, but on no account would our Cœlebs consent to any introductions. For two hours he stood in the hall, clinging with his right hand to the knob of the door against which he took his stand, as if fearful of being carried away by the prismatic current of white, blue and pink gauze that swept by him. "They are all very nice-looking birds—girls, I mean," he said to his cicerone in a half-nervous whisper; "but somehow I feel that they have the advantage of me here, there are so many of them and but one of me. I'd rather take them single-handed, at their homes. See that pale one sitting on the sofa? I don't feel afraid of her; but, poor thing! I guess she's lame, as nobody offers to hop with her. But I believe I'll go home to Mater, for I never was so tired in my life. Going to hops is awfully hard work. After all," he added sotto voce, "I don't think the one for me hops at all."

Regarding so much of the evening as virtually lost, he resolved to make it up by a talk with Mater, although she had retired for the night.

Now, is it to be supposed that this failure Number Two was a deathblow to the efforts of our modern Ajax? About as much so as a gopher-hill would be in the way of our Pacific Railroad push-a-heads. The only lion in the way was that absence from home and Mater which the new undertaking seem-

ed to necessitate; and this difficulty must be remedied.

You would have supposed that the fatigues of the past night had entitled poor Ben to his morning repose, but Hathaway had grown strangely selfish of late, as is sure to be the case with a one-ideaed man. He was the prince of good housekeepers, and to secure the few late vegetables that Mater cared anything for, he was in the habit, basket in hand, of attending the early market opening. Consequently, it was quite convenient to invade Ben's night-quarters at a most unseasonable hour.

What was Ben's astonishment, the morning after the hop, to have his half-open eyes soon after the dawn greeted by a sight of the inevitable Hathaway standing near the bedside, wash-bowl in hand! His ears were also greeted with the exclamation, "Come, Ben, it's late. Get up! I don't believe you'd think enough of me to be my valet; but souse in, old boy, and get your eyes open. I want to talk with you for ten minutes."

"Most efficient and peerless valet, I duly estimate the transcendent honor you confer upon me—at least I hope I do," said the poor victim—"and from the profoundest depths of my moral being render thanks the most sincere; but allow me to state, with all due gratitude and respect, that I shall be in a much better frame of mind and body to appreciate the favor three hours hence."

His grandiloquence was all lost upon Hathaway, judging by the preoccupied expression of the latter's countenance as he proceeded kindly to slap the cheeks of his somnolent friend with a moistened corner of the towel, having, with admirable forethought, squeezed out some of the ice-cold water.

"Ben," he inquired with flattering interest, "ain't you your ma's *only* baby?"

"Yes; and for that reason I've been always gloriously let alone till the breakfast-bell waked me."

"I'm glad to hear it. You see I shouldn't like to have any baby noise about Mater," continued the amiable

and fascinating valet in a tone as pre-occupied as his expression.

"Hath, what in the mischief are you talking about?" exclaimed Ben, as he sprang into a sitting posture and jerked the towel from his friend's hand.

"Oh, sure enough! I began at the wrong place. I stepped in to obtain the address of your mother and father. Didn't I hear you say they wanted to break up housekeeping and go to boarding?"

"Yes."

"Well, while I'm bird-hunting—ahem! getting married by January the second—I shall have to do more or less running around, and I can't bear to leave Mater so much alone, with only her faithful Hetty. I think your mother's will be just the company she needs; so I must know this very morning if your parents won't make my house their home."

"I will see them and let you know, and so save you the trouble of going to them."

"Well, do. Good-morning." After closing the door, he opened it again just enough to admit his head, and added, "Of course, Ben, I include you with your pa and ma."

"Well, I say, Hath, is it one of your domestic duties to arouse your boarders in the morning? I want to know that beforehand; and also whether or not there is to be a key to the domicile appropriated to the baby?"

"All right about rooms!" returned the obtuse landlord, vanishing down the steps.

Doctor and Mrs. Hall, before deciding, solicited an interview with their son's eccentric friend. The proposition made to them by Hathaway was simply this: that they should make his house their home, becoming to all intents and purposes members of his family.

"My object," said he, "is to provide suitable companionship and attendance for Mater during my frequent absences looking for a bird—wife, I mean."

"Wife!" ejaculated Mrs. Hall.

"Yes, for the second of January, when I'm to be married."

One objection only prevented the immediate consummation of the plan, which was the more acceptable to Dr. Hall as he was on the eve of a journey to Old England, his native land, where he was called by urgent family business. "Before my departure," he said, "a favorite niece of ours—Ethel by name—is to make us a long-promised visit. In a few days she will arrive. Were it not for her presence we would accept your kind invitation at once."

Hathaway replied that he was not going to allow such a slight obstacle to hinder the success of his schemes and mar his interests. He vowed that the young lady's presence would be an advantage rather than otherwise, as affording help to Mrs. Hall, who had agreed to assume the responsibilities of house-keeper as well as friend and companion. "The young lady," he added, "may have as many rooms up stairs as young ladies require, and both parlors all to herself and her callers; only I fear she will find it dull."

"Not for so short a time," Mrs. Hall thought.

"Do you know whether she plays and sings?" asked Hath.

"Oh, splendidly! She has supported herself for three years solely by those accomplishments."

So it was settled that the Halls should move immediately to "The Bird-Cage," as Hathaway had dubbed his residence.

On his way home he stepped into a music store and ordered the best piano in the establishment to be sent to his house. "Mater's love for music can now be gratified," he murmured. And the thought lent elasticity to his steps and buoyancy to his spirits as he hastened home to acquaint the invalid, for the first time, with his new arrangements for her comfort.

Dr. Hall, relieved of the cares of hospitality and greatly convenienceed by the suddenly-effected arrangement, left for England immediately, and the day after his departure Mrs. Hall was duly established in an apartment of her own selection at the Bird-Cage. She was not a stranger to the invalid. At Ben's

solicitation she had called upon Mater frequently of late, and the two ladies, discovering an unexpected congeniality, had become quite friendly.

Ben chose for his quarters an upper room in the remote wing, far removed from early morning bustle.

"I hope you will excuse my remaining so far from you," remarked Hathaway, feelingly, "as my post of duty is near my beloved Mater."

"I will excuse you," responded Ben with solemn sympathy in his tones and great gravity of mien. "I hope that my presence here will not cause you to neglect your duty to her, especially at early morn."

In a few days the expected niece arrived, and, though much surprised at finding herself the guest of a lady she had never seen, she made no serious objections, in consideration of her aunt's feelings and wishes.

Mrs. Hall was requested to preside at the head of the table, and upon poor Ben were forced the carving responsibilities of the foot. This was rendered somewhat necessary by a habit Hathaway had, when feebleness confined Mater to her room, of taking her meals to her himself, and eating with her.

The first morning after the last arrival, while Ben and his fair cousin still lingered at the table, Mater suggested to Hathaway that he should go and make the young lady's acquaintance, as he had not yet seen her. Taking the beautiful little key-basket in his hand, he entered the dining-room, and was just on the point of extending his hand very cordially, when the lady drew back with some degree of surprise and *hauteur* and glanced inquiringly at Ben, who rose hastily and uttered the words of formal introduction.

Going up quite near her, Hath said, "Miss—What is your name? I didn't catch it?"

To cover his cousin's confusion, Ben here put in: "Don't be at all surprised, Cousin Ethel. Mr. Strange could not remember his own name if it was like anybody else's."

"Ah, it's Miss Ethel, then! Well,

Miss Ethel, I am at present under a great stress of important business, and am compelled to be much from home. I think young persons should relieve old ones as much as possible. My aunt is an invalid, but will, I hope, receive you in her room in a day or two. You will make her comfort your chief care —after that you can consult your own convenience. You will open that door this morning and give her some good old-fashioned music: no operatic squalling, if you please. Here are the keys. The servants will carry out any orders you may give. Luncheon at twelve; dinner at four. Good-morning!" And he strode down the hall without another word and without even looking behind.

Ethel rose quickly and said to Ben, "Where is my aunt? I must see her." The glow on her cheek and the sparkle in her eye plainly indicated the state of her feelings and the nature of her intentions.

Ben, gently detaining her, said, "Now, coz, I know what's to pay with you. I have just told you that fellow is strange, but that's the worst of him, for a nobler specimen of the *genus homo* does not exist. He knows no more how to talk to a woman than you do to a gorilla. The fellow is dead in love with somebody, it is to be hoped, for he tells me that he is to be married before long; so you can make all due allowance for his oddities. Just humor them as I do. Treat him like an old woman, and we'll have rare times at his expense. You will be charmed with the mistress of the house, Mater, as Hath calls his aunt; in regard to whose comfort I may say he is crazy. She is one of the sweetest, loveliest, most intelligent beings you ever saw, and you have but to know her to love her. And now let me open the piano for you, for you must obey orders, and you'll soon feel perfectly at home here, and find the place every way agreeable."



II.

CHAPTER III.
THE MODERN CELEBS.

THE golden moments of Hathaway's courting period were fleeting by, and it became a matter of urgent necessity for him to pursue some systematic plan to discover the one fair charmer who was to be the singing-bird of his Cage after the coming second day of January. It was arranged, therefore, that two evenings in the week should be devoted by the young gentlemen to calling; and this chapter of our story shall be dedicated to some of Hathaway's courting experiences.

Miss Clio Clisby was the first young lady upon whom the wife-hunters called. After sending up their cards they were ushered into an elegant parlor and told that Miss Clio "would be in presently." Two minutes had hardly elapsed before Hathaway asked, "Why don't she come along, Ben?"

"Why, my boy, you certainly would not expect a belle to make her appearance in less than half an hour? Miss Clio always tells me to bring some papers along *pour passer le temps*."

"Well, can't we go somewhere else, and get back here in time?"

"No. Just quiet yourself, young man," which the "young man" essayed to do by settling his head on the arm of the tête-à-tête and resting his heels on the grate-blower.

After a time the opening and shutting of a door above, and the rustling of silk down the stairs, announced an approach. Hath very deliberately assumed an upright position, taking the everlasting watch from his side and glancing at it: "Twenty-nine and a half minutes! Half a minute ahead of schedule time!" Which observation,

let us hope, escaped the ears of the sweeping train-bearer, who glided slowly into the room with the cold and haughty dignity of a blue-blood aristocrat.

Ben, in the best of humors, advanced with his greeting, then turned to introduce his friend, who snapped his watch to just at the moment Miss Clio was preparing to receive his obeisance. The main subject discussed was the last and next "hop," a subject by no means agreeable to our strange hero. It may be surmised that the visit was neither pleasant nor satisfactory to Hathaway, for at the first allusion to leavetaking he rose quickly, and, accompanying his "Good-evening, ma'am," with a *very* low bow, was at the front door, hat in hand, ere Ben had given his assurances of the charming evening they had passed.

"How did you like her?" Ben whispered as they descended the steps.

"Like! umph! Why, I never thought of such a thing as *like*."

"You don't pretend to say, my dear sir, that you were not enraptured with the best-dressed girl in the city?"

"She took so long to put her dress on that I could not forgive her long enough to look at it. But we won't have to come here again, I hope?"

"Not unless she sends for us; but, really, you *must* have been somewhat impressed. She is considered the *crème de la crème* of society."

"She may be cream and sugar both, but she won't do to go into Mater's coffee, or mine either. Why, we should never get it hot the year round!"

Diagonally opposite the Strange mansion stood the scarcely less proud one of Mr. Daniel de Graw, graced by the presence of four daughters, three of

whom might fairly be considered as on the carpet. Ben had not failed to remark that Miss Scylla, the eldest, happened very frequently to be training vines in the front verandah just at that morning hour when the methodical Hath passed by on his way to habitual duties. He resolved, therefore, on the coming Friday evening to introduce his friend to the family, whose nice little soirées he had been attending for three years or more. Indeed, he was on very easy terms with Miss Chary, the second sister. Madame de Graw, in her scant reading, had stumbled upon the names "Scylla" and "Charybdis," and, in blissful ignorance of their classical reputation, had appropriated them as appellations for two of her daughters.

The following Friday evening found Ben and his wife-hunting friend in the handsome parlor of Madame de Graw, most cordially welcomed by the expectant Miss Scylla, who declared their coming very opportune, as several of her friends had also happened in unexpectedly, thus giving the family a most agreeable surprise.

Ben, feeling that Miss Scylla was entirely competent to take care of the uninitiated, contrived to place his charge immediately in her neighborhood. Now, Miss Scylla, whose carefully-cultivated flaxen ringlets lent youthfulness to her appearance, had noticed the arrival of the piano at the house over the way, and was consequently sure that the distingué owner must dote on music. She was therefore soon leading him across the room in response to an expressed desire of his to hear her play. Hath, the tyro, not at all au fait as to the duties of a gallant on such an occasion, took his seat at some distance and gazed into the fire with an appearance of concentrated meditation. During the first pause after a brilliant operatic performance, without turning his eyes from their gaze into the fire, he inquired, "Can you sing any plain songs, like 'Twilight Dews' or 'The Soldier's Tear?'"

The performer's embarrassment was visible, and might have become painful had not Ben, ever watchful, hastened

to fill up the pause by an extravaganza of admiration for the "gem" with which she had favored them, and which she had executed "with such admirable spirit and brilliancy."

Our visitors took leave of the company at a late hour, Ben having, with that social tact of which he was master, managed to place Hathaway in convenient juxtaposition to each of the ladies, anticipating certain success in some quarter. On their return home they found a good fire in the green parlor, and Ben insisted on Hath's sitting down and giving the result of his evening's experiences: "Now I know, with six to choose from, your fastidious taste must have been suited. How did you and Miss Chary get on?"

"Oh, first rate! Methinks maybe she's to be my Bird. By the by, Ben, which comes first—engagement or courtship? It strikes me that, if you've seen enough of a girl to know that she will suit you, the *next* thing is to see her father and get matters arranged. That being done, you can fill up with the courtship, more or less, according as you have time, till the wedding-day. What a deal of time and trouble is lost if, after a long courtship, you get No for your pains!"

"But," said the alarmed Ben, "I hope you did not get that far to-night?"

"Well, no! I only told her I was looking around;—and, oh, Ben, you ought to have seen what a beautiful pinkish color spread over her neck and jaws as she held her bunch of flowers before her face and said she would give me all the assistance in her power, as she had understood I was not a lady's man. It was very kind in her, and I felt like a vessel just launched from the dry-dock into smooth water. Just at that delightful moment who should come along but that chatty little lady in black! And—would you believe it?—just like some of Signor Blitz's sleight-of-hand tricks, before I knew it Miss Chary was gone and her place occupied by the little lady in black! Of course I asked her for whom she was in mourning. (You know I wanted to tell her

how sorry I felt.) But she really looked astonished at my very natural question, and put her embroidered handkerchief to her eyes to wipe away a tear. To talk to such a one about *gay* things I knew was wrong; so I discoursed of death and the fond memories that attach to departed loved ones, and said I could not see how any one could ever think of marrying twice. She did not seem to like that at all—I don't know why—for she looked at me sharply and said,

That was not more unaccountable than the way some young ladies fancied those crusty, strange, fault-finding old bachelors."

"Hath, you consummate blunderbuss! that is the gay little Widow Witcher, and it is said she keeps to her weeds because they are becoming to her complexion. Well, who came next to her?"

"Let me see!" resumed the adventurer. "About that time refreshments were brought in, and I got swapped around somehow, and found myself beside Miss Ermine Belgart, on the opposite side of the room. As I could think of nothing else to say, I told her how pleased I was with Miss Chary. She was greatly astonished that I had not heard that Miss Chary was to be Mrs. Somebody in a few weeks. Then I began to observe Miss Ermine herself more close. If I am not mistaken, about the first thing I asked her was, if she liked old people. She said she supposed she *might* do so if they made themselves very agreeable to the young people. I then inquired if she could make gruel and do up cap-borders. What in the world, Ben, do you suppose could have made her give me such a strange look in reply to such a civil question? I looked in the fire a moment, waiting for an answer, and, lo! when I raised my eyes the chair was vacant. I beheld her on the other side of the room laughing immoderately about something while talking to Miss Scylla. Just then I saw that little De Graw girl standing near me, and I requested her to take the empty chair, which she did. I said to her, 'Well,

sissy, to whom do you go to school now?' 'That is a *strange* question,' she replied, looking at me in roguish surprise. 'Does your mamma usually allow you to remain in the parlor with grown company so late?' I asked, for she *is* young to be sitting up so long. With just the same sort of look Miss Ermine and the widow had given me she tossed her little head in a way that was laughable, and demanded of me, 'Do tell me, Mr. Strange, to which of your Revolutionary contemporaries you were most attached?' Poor child! Does not her assigning such a recent date to the Revolution show how very superficial is the course of female education at the present day?"

Ben dropped his face into his hands and would have exploded again, had not Hathaway begged him to be very quiet, for fear of waking Mater.

"Well," said Ben, "I saw you throwing away your time on the little miss, and so got your sixth and last subject into the chair—Miss Macaw, who this season is turning the heads of all her beaux. I am crazy now to hear about her."

"I don't know how it could be, but she seemed to know exactly who I was," Hath replied; "for she began by saying she had seen me riding out in the afternoon with our mutual friend, Mr. Hall, and oh what a charming span I had! A ride was *so* exhilarating these mild autumnal afternoons! So I told her that if she would promise not to keep me waiting I would call for her next Monday afternoon, as I had most leisure on that day. She said she had seen me at the hop, but only at a distance. Did I not leave early? Was I not fond of dancing? How did I resist the temptation on that occasion? We had a little argument on the subject, her strong point being the healthful exercise dancing afforded to young ladies. 'As to that,' I remarked, 'if girls would do more sweeping and dusting at home, beat up their own beds and biscuit, feed the chickens and take long walks in doing good among the poor, they would have exercise enough.' She had time only to say, 'Oh how cruel, Mr.

Strange!' when the company began to break up, and I left her.

"On coming away, Miss Scylla followed me into the hall and remarked that her attention to other guests had made it impossible to devote much time to any one of them. She hoped I would call again, as she should be happy to see me. I said, 'Maybe so—it depends on circumstances,' and bade her good-evening. She smiled sweetly with a 'Good-evening, Mr. Strange.' And I'm mighty glad it's all over, for I am tired and sleepy."

Hathaway did not forget his engagement to ride with Miss Macaw. On his return he took up Ben in order to report details. It appeared that he had treated the young lady to quite a lengthy ride on the turnpike.

"I thought I might as well prolong the ride, as it was the last she would get behind my span."

"Did you tell her so?" asked Ben.

"Well, no—not exactly; but I did ask her if she knew any other lady who wanted to ride."

"Did anything occur to mar her pleasure, do you think?" queried the uneasy Ben.

"As we came through the toll-gate on our return we saw a poor, wearied-looking woman seated on a stone by the roadside, with a young baby in her arms. Of course I drew up and asked if she was going into the city and would take a seat with us in the buggy. She answered that she should soon be rested, and could not think of crowding us. But I insisted on it, and, handing Miss Macaw the baby to hold while I put the woman into the buggy, I jumped up behind and drove on. It turned out that the child's mother was a sewing-woman going to collect a bill from the very Miss Macaw with whom I was riding. So I put them both down at the front gate of Miss Macaw's residence, and told the woman I would wait and carry her home, which I did. 'Did you get your money?' I asked. 'No,' said she. 'They told me to come again next week.' But I spared her the trou-

ble by footing the bill myself, under promise of profound secrecy."

"How did Miss Macaw seem to enjoy the latter part of the ride?"

"Why—would you think it?—she kept her flounces and furbelows held tightly over her lap, and never turned her head once toward her poor companion. To a pleasant remark of mine she did not even deign a reply."

Our two friends were beyond the city limits by this time, and Ben made the woods ring with his peals of laughter.

"Hath," he said in answer to the imploring look turned on him, "I am afraid you are too hard to please. There are spots on the sun even. You must not look for *perfection* in this world."

"Oh, Ben," he cried, with a tremor in his voice and unbidden tears starting to his eyes, "you know it's not *myself* I am trying to suit: *I* can get along with any of them, but poor Mater! If I could secure for her declining years the gentle, congenial companionship she needs, I'd esteem myself the happiest of mortals. To attain such an object I should deem no sacrifice too great. I'd crawl on my knees and lay my home and fortune at the feet of any woman who would prove such a companion, and whose warm, loving heart would beat in unison with mine in its efforts and determination to make my darling Mater happy."

Ben Hall's merriment ceased. He suddenly became aware that there was a method and an object in his friend's supposed lunacy, and a softer, holier feeling—a feeling not unmixed with a tearful admiration—took possession of him.

CHAPTER IV. THE IDES OF MARCH.

THE presence of Mrs. Hall and her niece had demonstrated the benefit—nay, necessity—of just such companionship as Hathaway wanted to secure for Mater; for under the combined influences of pleasant society, congenial intercourse, thoughtful care and kind

assistance, dear Mater began slowly to improve, and to recover health, strength, color and spirits. She had completely won the hearts of her two female guests; and no wonder, for such a dear, sweet, lovable woman is rarely to be met with, even if she was an invalid. There was such an attractive charm in her voice, manner and words, so much cultivation and good sense, such amiable piety, such sweetly-expressed gratefulness for all favors extended and such a lively appreciation of all benefits conferred, that Hathaway's devotion ceased to be a matter of surprise. And unconsciously the entire household vied with each other in seeing who could add most to Mater's comfort and happiness. What wonder, then, that the roses began to creep back to her cheeks, and the old sparkle to flash in her eye, and the merry tones once more to well up from her lips, and the look of mournful languor to disappear! One of Hathaway's purchases for the benefit of his aunt was a large, low-swung carriage and the handsome but safe bays which had excited Miss Macaw's admiration; and several times Mrs. Hall and Ethel had taken the invalid out, well enveloped in wraps, to behold the woodland glories of the Indian summer.

The solicitous nephew hailed all such events with joy, and never failed to express his delight whenever he found the ladies relieving Mater of domestic cares. He had occasionally detected Miss Ethel preparing some culinary dainty with which to tempt his aunt's appetite, and frequently he had noticed her tripping about the room with cat-like tread, assisting Mater on or off her couch, smoothing the pillow, drawing the curtain to exclude the light, replenishing the flower vases, and doing fifty little things for her comfort which *he* never would have thought of.

What surprised both Mrs. Hall and Ethel was, that no allusion was made by the aunt to the expected change in the household. Ben, not so reticent, frequently mentioned the subject, and even alluded to the second of January as the set time. But nobody paid par-

ticular attention to what Ben said, albeit he *may* have known more than he chose to express.

True to the common apprehension on the subject, old Father Time waited for no man, and so the middle of December drew nigh, and, so far as the general knowledge went, Hath was no nearer the attainment of his object than when he began his search.

Miss Ethel's guardian, getting impatient at her protracted absence from home, wrote peremptorily for her immediate return. She quietly announced her early departure to her kind hostess, and was much surprised at the exhibition of grief that followed. Mater's door was closed for the night, and all entrance but Hathaway's forbidden.

"Do you know that Ethel is to leave us to-morrow afternoon at four?" she said when he was seated by her bedside.

"Why, I had no idea of such a thing. I supposed she was going to live with us always. I think it very unkind in her to leave you."

"You do not suppose, Hathey, that my pleasure is her business for life? But oh what shall I do without her? When she enters my room I feel that a white dove has flown in and alighted close at my side. But I cannot ask her to stay longer, although her presence and kind ministrations were bringing back the strength to this poor worn-out body of mine. Would you believe it, Hathey, I actually walked across the floor without assistance to-day!" Hath expressed his great joy. "But I believe," Mater continued, "that it was Ethel's words of kind encouragement that enabled me to do so. Last night I was thinking I would get you to select some token of affection and offer it to her for me, she has been so very kind. I know she would accept no other remuneration."

"Leave that to me—I will attend to it," was the sedate reply.

The following morning the topic at the breakfast-table was Ethel's departure. Mrs. Hall thought the green-house

flowers would suffer by her absence, for she had spent much of her time in tending them. "By the by, Mr. Strange, you will allow her to gather a bouquet by way of affectionate remembrance, will you not?"

"Certainly, certainly! I was just wondering what I could give you, Miss Ethel, as a token of my aunt's affection and gratitude for your kindness to her. Get the clippers and let us gather the flowers now."

Together they entered the conservatory, and soon her lap, as she sat on one of the rustic seats, was full of the choicest floral treasures.

"My aunt seems really grieved at your leaving," he said. "Don't you love her, Miss Ethel?"

"I hardly see how one could help it."

"I hope you will not forget her when you are away. To provide against that contingency, she wishes you to accept of some slight token of her appreciation of your kindness."

"Oh, I don't wish anything but that she should think of me sometimes."

"But, Miss Ethel, Mater's word is law, and she says I must give you something. The best of it is, she has allowed me the privilege of selecting the offering. Of course you will value it all the more if it is something *she* prizes very highly. I don't know what you young ladies *prefer*, but I know what *you* may have for the taking—her unworthy nephew;—truly a slight token, but one longing to be offered—tremendously anxious to be accepted. By his deathless gratitude to her, by all in him that is worthy of your acceptance, oh refuse him not, and, by the help of God, you shall never repent it."

"Are you going to invite me to your wedding on the second proximo, Mr. Strange?" inquired Ethel, archly. "I can make it so very convenient to call at that time, on my way to Virginia, where I am going to reside hereafter."

"That's what I am trying to do now, with all my might," he replied, a sickening fear taking hold of him that some more favored mortal already possessed a claim to her heart and hand. "That

blundering cousin of yours, Ben, has let me get things dreadfully mixed up by putting *first* what should have been last, and permitting *last* what should have been first; and a deal of trouble and uneasiness has he given me. It seems to me I am going to feel very awkward making a single-handed affair of the second of January. Indeed, I am beginning to fear the project will fall through entirely if Miss Ethel does not consent to be an interested party. But come off it must, according to Mater's fiat. And now all I need is to have something hanging on my arm—something, for instance, like this little hand of yours holding these flowers. May I have it? Oh, Miss Ethel, can prouder words be spoken by man than the sacred vow 'to love, honor and obey' the woman who, in sweet and loving trust, gives her heart and happiness into his keeping?"

"Then, I suppose," answered Miss Ethel, with the most delicious little smile that ever dimpled the face of Beauty, while she suffered the little bouquet-holder to resign its floral treasures, "the duty 'to love, comfort, honor and keep' must devolve on the other party taking the vow? Stupendous undertaking!"

But, dear reader, the whole of the young lady's packing is to be done, and we have been eavesdropping long enough behind these limes and lemons. Indeed, that unfair advantage would not have been necessary could the communicative Ben have got possession of the facts just related.

When Hathaway emerged from the conservatory the ground on which he walked was solid gold; each tree and shrub glittered with paradisiacal glory; the morning breeze was redolent with fragrance from Araby the Blest; the substantial mansion he had left but a few moments ago, "glamoured by a glare," was an air castle, reflecting from a hundred crystal points its rainbow hue; while above, from its azure bed, rose on his new life the Star of Love which was to know no setting.

Out in the verandah, where Mrs. Hall

met them and inspected the bouquet, Hath gave his hand to Miss Ethel in a hasty adieu, remarking that he should be too busy to see her again before she left.

Passing out at the gate with Ben, he glanced at the green-house, from which he felt that he never wanted to take his eyes, and inquired, absently, "Ben, did you ever know any one to look all over the house for his spectacles and then find them on his own nose?"

But Ben was getting so well accustomed to the vagaries of his young innocent as frequently to let them pass without query.

"Apropos of spectacles, Hath, I forgot to tell you that we received yesterday from Miss Scylla an invitation to meet a few friends there to-morrow night. And, as I live, there she is tying up that sickly clematis at this matutinal hour for the fiftieth time!"

"How sweet Miss Scylla looks this morning!" said Hathaway, giving her a graceful salute and his companion a bran-new idea.

"Is it distance or love that lends enchantment to the view—eh, Jemima?"

That was one of Ben's names for "the old woman," as he called our Hath.

"Hush, Ben! Don't talk of love! What do *you* know about it?"

"So you're on hand for Miss Scylla's invitation, I see plainly?"

"Well, yes—no. To tell the truth, Ben, Drewry & Co." (our Hath was "Co.") "have taken a new partner into the firm, and, preparatory to said arrangement, I shall have to take a run upon the Central Railroad every week or so till matters are consummated to my desire. For a time, therefore, I must sing truce to love and soirées—to ladies and matrimony."

"Take care, old boy, how you let your days of grace glide by! Remember, the Ides of your March are approaching!"

"Ah, ain't they?" replied Hathaway, rubbing his hands together in a perfect child's glee as he darted into his official brownstone front.

"Poor unwary voyager!" sighed Ben,

looking after him, "on Scylla's rock to strand!"

The days rolled by. Mater continued to improve unaccountably, much to the joy and satisfaction of her nephew, and was now able to walk to and from the dining-room. A softer, sweeter light gleamed in her eye and irradiated her countenance. Was it because she was reaping the full, rich reward of her sacrifices, and beheld the long-desired consummation of all her life-hopes?

Of course Hath's little *business run*, the next week, upon the Central Railroad excited no suspicion—said business, on this occasion, being the formal transfer of Ethel's guardianship in a prospective point of view.

On the last day of the year Ben received a hasty note from his fair cousin, saying that instead of going to the State of Virginia she was going to the state of Matrimony, and would expect him to "assist," while it would devolve upon her just-returned uncle to give the bride away. In a postscript she added that he might bring his friend *Have-his-way* along too, as there was no telling what effect a good example might have on him.

The reading of that letter made quite a surprise party of the entire household but Mater, the information being withheld from her, at Hathaway's special request, until it was ascertained whether or not Miss Ethel had "done well."

The Halls were to go up the next day, as the ceremony was to be performed the day after. Hath, declining attendance, sent his "regrets" in the form of a press of business and care of Mater, and his "compliments" in the shape of a set of diamonds, with a promise to profit by the example whenever practicable.

The morning of the second dawned. The groom had been there a few days previous, they said, and would arrive by the nine o'clock train, and be received by Ethel and her guardian in the front parlor. He was heard passing in at the hour appointed, all things being in readiness for the ceremony—the

minister standing and the company all waiting.

The folding doors were pushed aside and the ceremony went on. So spell-bound were the spectators after its conclusion that not a word or movement broke the silence. The groom, wearing an expression on his face that would be disgraced by so weak a word as *ecstasy*, approached, with his shrinking bride, a few paces toward the gazing circle, then turning to her, said, "I believe, Miss Ethel, congratulations follow next in order—to which I think you fully entitled for having 'done so well.'"

"And kisses next," said Mrs. Hall, advancing, "though I am not sure but you deserve a tweak," taking the bride by the ear, "for cheating your auntie out of the pleasure of keeping a secret."

Dr. Hall next came forward with the observation that he thought the "occupation" of giving away the bride was "gone" when she hath-a-way of disposing of herself.

And where was the petrified Ben? Betrayed in his hasty retreat to the deep recesses of a bay window by the measured sounds issuing therefrom, "*Strange—if—true!*" Venturing nearer, he ejaculated with arousing emphasis, "Not too late for the gratulations, old Sly-boots," giving Hath a twelve-pounder slap on the back of his shoulder, "and just in time for the kisses, fair cousin."

"Which you shall have by the baker's dozen," put in Hath, throwing his arms around his poor victim, and giving him an embrace that would have done credit to a boa-constrictor; "and which are all you'll get, too, sir, for dragging me around so mercilessly for the last two months—"

"While the spectacles were all the time over your own nose," finished Ben, releasing himself from the anaconda-like embrace, and glad to do so, even at the price of the kisses foregone for that occasion.

Hathaway, longing to give Mater her share of the general joy, announced that but sixty minutes remained for wine and cake and for making prepa-

rations to leave. "We must all sup with Mater," he said.

CHAPTER V.

FINALE.

IT is the second day of January, and the sun, far down the western sky, is casting his last bright, happiness-boding beams upon a procession of handsome carriages that are driving rapidly up to the front door of the "Birdcage."

Mater is sitting in her parlor, the radiance of the day-god suffusing her sweet, smiling countenance with a glow of beauty. With a step anything but deliberate, Hathaway stalks into the room, leading his newly-found treasure, stoops and prints one fond kiss on Mater's cheek, and then triumphantly exclaims, "Here is my wife, Mater!" And he points to the date-card over the mantel-piece: "See, it is the second!"

"A very pretty joke, my dear son, but too delightful for a reality," replies the pleasantly shocked Mater.

"Which—excusing your impeachment of your nephew's veracity—happily can be substantiated by all these witnesses," pointing at the same time to a crowd of smiling faces that thronged into the room.

"Yes, Aunt Mater, I, the more veracious Ben, am here to certify that at Halcyondale, this morning at nine o'clock, the last day of grace, were united in the holy bands of wedlock, by the proper officiating authority, Mr. Hathaway Strange and Miss Ethel—Miss Ethel—Who, Hath? Miss Ethel—who?"

"Miss Ethel—I declare, I don't exactly believe I—Miss Ethel—*Hall*, I guess. Wasn't it, Miss Ethel?" stammered the dumbfounded Benedict.

"Well!" cried the revenged Ben, bringing his hand down on his knee with a tremendous slap, and his foot down on the floor with telling force, "ain't that old 'Jemima' over again?" And he rushed out into the hall and up to his room to express his feelings to their fullest extent.

"At any rate," said Mater, tenderly and lovingly, taking the nameless one's hand, "you know what the *new* name is, don't you, dear?" And she drew the happy Ethel down and kissed her fondly, adding, "And may you both be as faithful to the Giver of all good and to each other as you have been to your poor suffering but now happy Mater! And may a joy like that which now makes such sweet sunshine in my heart," added she, rising, "irradiate your lives and dispel every cloud of doubt and sorrow! God bless you, my children!"

She took a hand in each of hers, and pressed it gently, while her face seemed to overrun with happiness as Hath again stooped and kissed her, saying, "But it was cruel in me to leave you here entirely alone all day. Did you know, Mater, that when I stole away from my room in the night to take the midnight train, I smuggled in your good Dr. Neil for the rest of the night, in case you should get sick and need some attention? But I know you will forgive me now, since I have brought *her* back; and here she is, looking as much at home as—"

"I can't say that I *feel* that way, standing here all this while with my hat and gloves on," said Ethel. "If you have not been so demented in the last two days as to lose my keys (which you know you gave me long ago), I would thank you to hand them to me and let me go and look after supper and see that Mater's buckwheat cakes for breakfast are not neglected." And she slipped out of the prison which his arms were making for her, and disappeared, followed by Hathaway, her guardian and Dr. Hall, who had been deeply-moved spectators of all that had taken place.

Left alone now with Mater, Mrs. Hall stepped forward, folded her arms most affectionately around the invalid and

kissed her. "Brace yourself, darling; he is very near!" she whispered.

Mater straightened herself up suddenly. A mighty tide of feeling gushed from her heart-fountain and overwhelmed her whole being. For a moment a crimson glow animated her neck, cheek and brow, and then receding left her pale and trembling. But a strange light of hope, joy and quivering anticipation shone in her eye. Suddenly she saw in the doorway the manly form of one of middle age, whose deep blue eyes beamed with love, faith, constancy and holy devotion.

"Annette! my Annette!" he murmured; and instantly his arms were around her, and he bore her to a sofa, helpless, senseless, her head resting on his shoulder and her lips parted as though to speak.

A glance is sufficient to reveal the fact that the man is a brother of Mrs. Hall. For years he had been in England seeking to recover a family estate, and with the help of his brother-in-law, Dr. Hall, had just succeeded.

'Tis needless to say that Mrs. Hall's penetration and good sense had brought about the happy dénouement we have just witnessed, and had been the cause of Mater's gradually restored health through the agency of hope, sweet hope!

Joy does not kill. Reposing in his faithful arms, in less than five minutes Mater had forgotten all her troubles and sorrows in the bliss of hope and love realized at last.

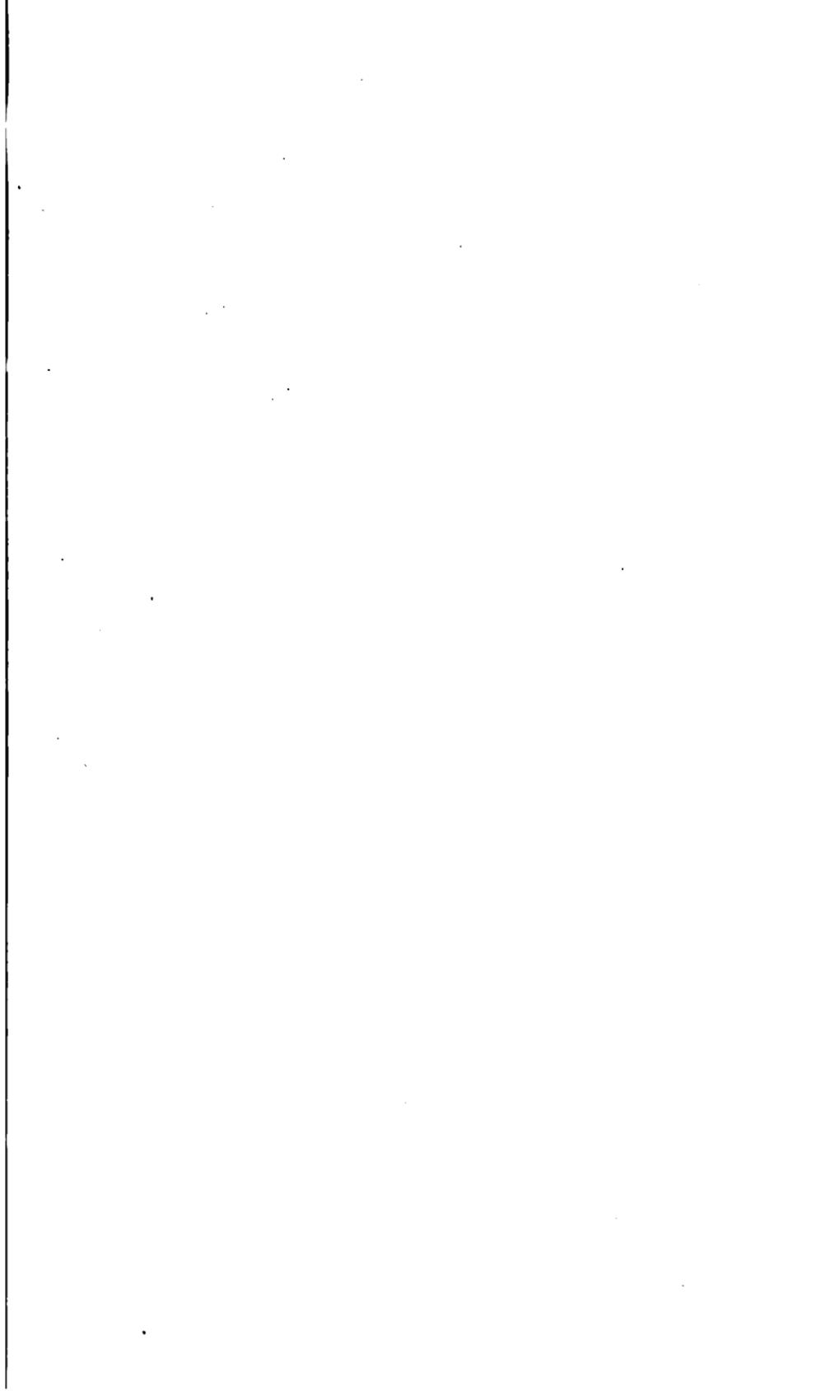
To this day Ben affirms that Hath had to consult the morning paper for the missing name, which proved to be no other than *Byrd*; and he is sometimes ready to swear that as often as not Hath uses the polite prefix *Miss*. Usually, however, he prefers a personal pronoun denoting possession, which, plain to see and sweet to hear, makes it **MY ETHEL BIRD!**

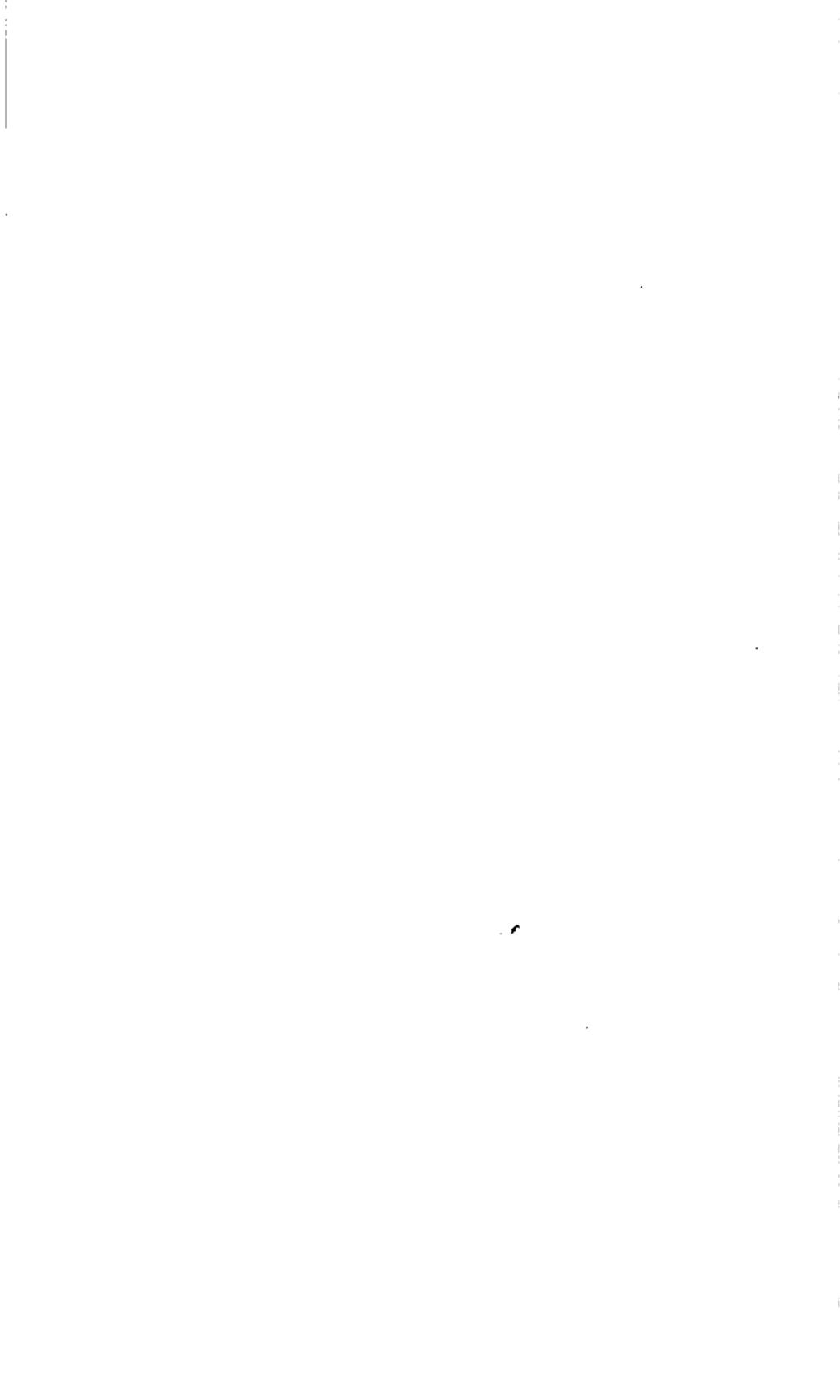
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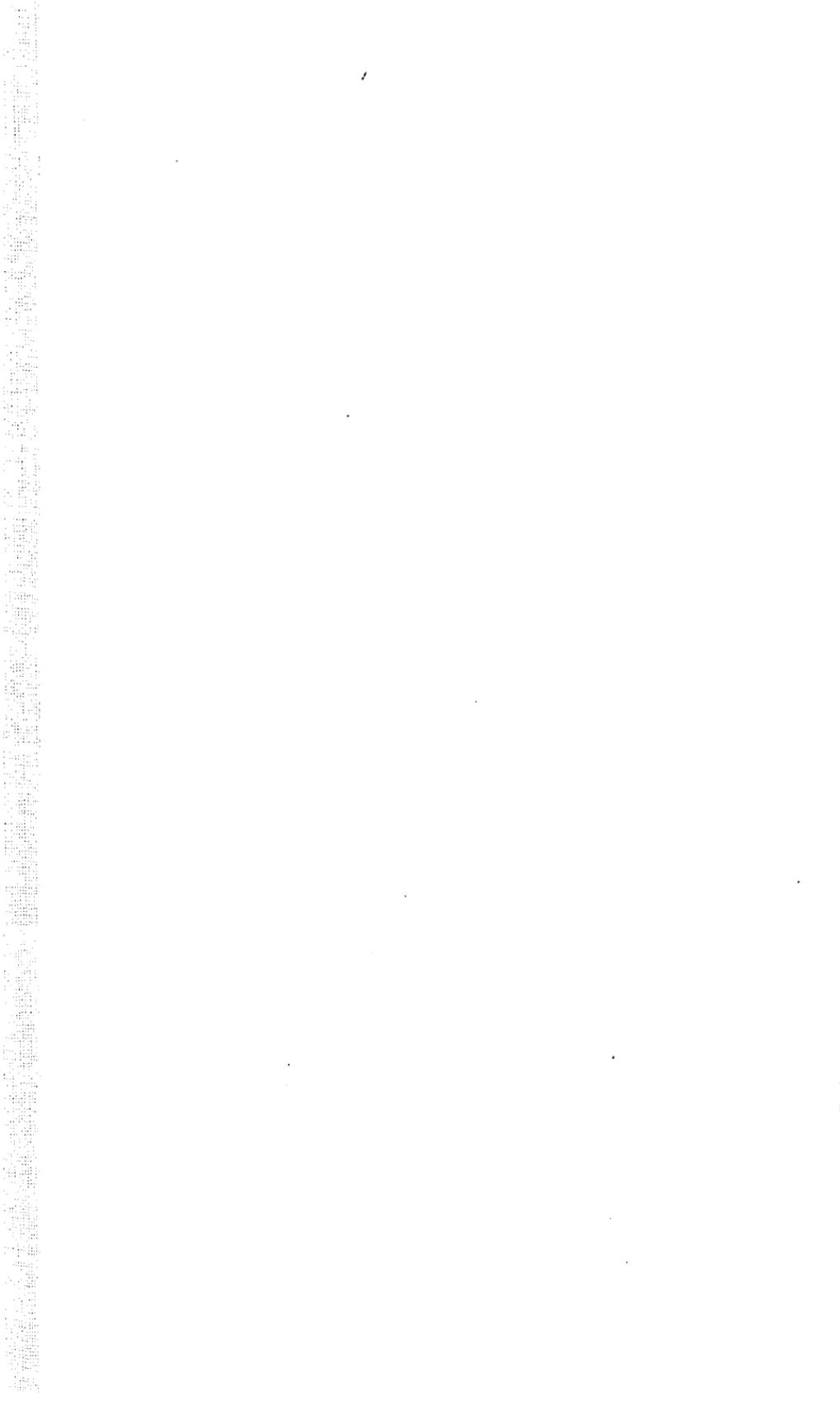
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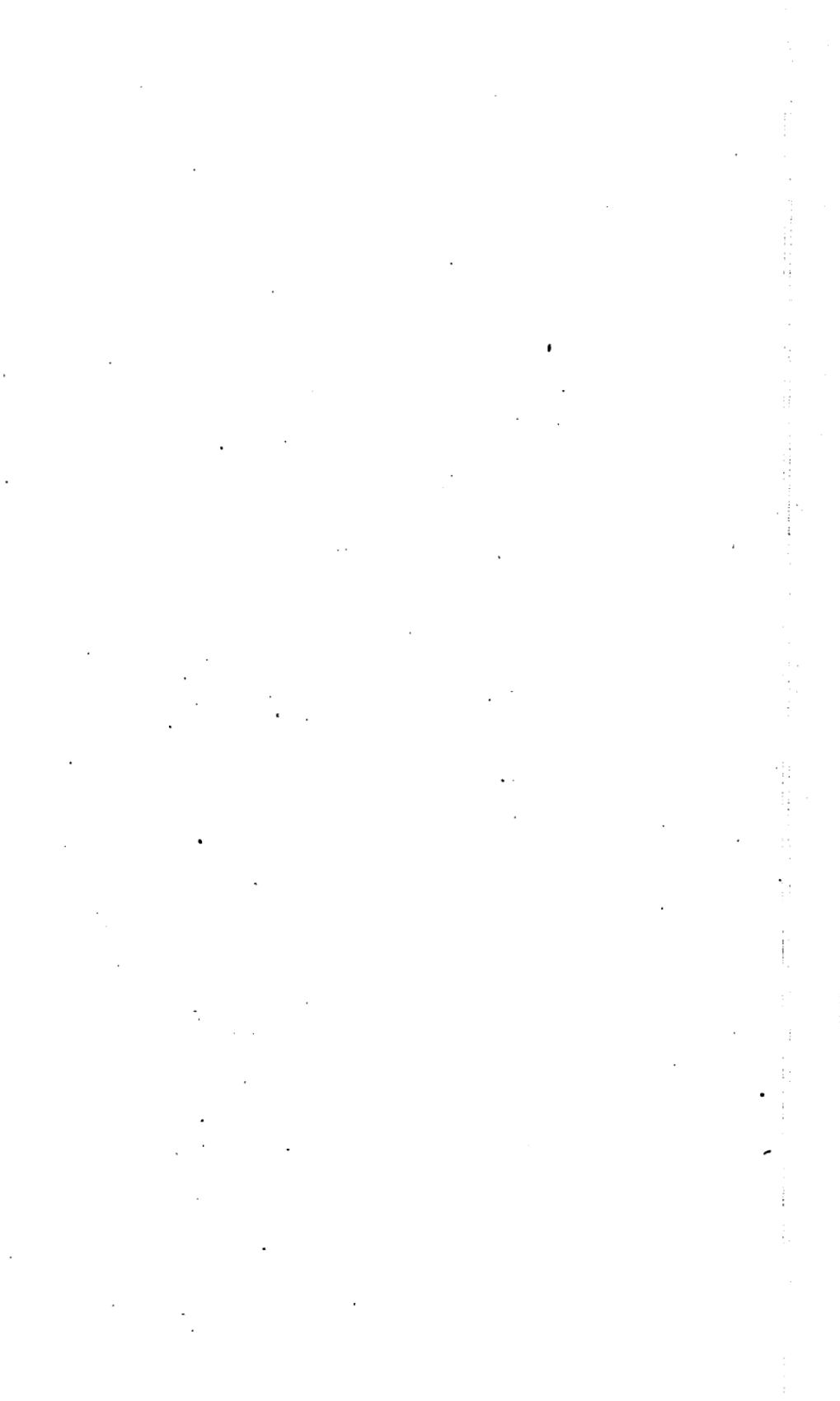
LONG ISLAND CITY, N. Y.











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